

Dancing With The Rebels

How are we to understand the strong French presence in Côte d'Ivoire from 2002-2007?

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PREFACE

On November 9th, 2007, I found myself on an Air France plane from Paris to Abidjan ready to undertake what would prove to be one of the most interesting tasks of my life so far. My intention was to conduct a short fieldwork in the country of which my thesis is focused, namely Côte d'Ivoire. Next to me on the plane sat a pleasant woman, a French national whom had been a resident of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire for more than 34 years. She appeared to take a liking to me quite early and thus engaged into several conversations throughout the flight. It became apparent from the beginning that we had a language barrier due to her lack of knowledge of the English language, and to my less proficient French skills. However, we managed to converse and she tried to convey to me many lessons to take aboard for my trip. Close to the end of the flight the obvious question arose; the reason for my trip. It was quite clear that I was not a tourist due to the unstable situation in the country. But I had practiced the oral introduction of my work, previous to my departure, and had therefore no problems explaining my intentions with this trip to her; that I was looking more closely at the relationship between Côte d'Ivoire and France in the period from 2002-2007. Her response, on the other hand, I was not prepared for. Yet it was so in tune with the feelings I had of nervousness and excitement for my research. Her response?

“C'est diabolic”.

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Figure 1. Map of Côte d'Ivoire

(Relief Web 2008)

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List Of Acronyms

AFP	Agence France Presse the French Press Agency
BIMa	43 ^e bataillon d'infanterie de marina 43 rd Marine Infantry Battalion in Abidjan
CFA	<i>Communaute Financiere Africane</i> Central African CFA
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FANCI	<i>Forces Armées Nationales de Côte d'Ivoire</i> The Ivorian National Army
FPI	<i>Front Populaire Ivoirien</i> the Ivorian Popular Front
FN	<i>Forces Nouvelles</i> the New Forces
ICG	International Crisis Group
LMA	Linas-Marcoussis Accord
MINUCI	<i>La Mission des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire</i> United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire
MJP	<i>Mouvement pour la justice et la paix</i> Movement for Justice and Peace
MPCI	<i>Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire</i> Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire

MPIGO	<i>Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest</i> Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PDCI	<i>Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire</i> The Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire
RDA:	<i>Rassemblement Démocratique Africain</i>
RDR	<i>Rassemblement de Républicains</i> Rally of the Republicans
RF	<i>Radio France Internationale</i> French International Radio
RTI	<i>Radio Télévision Ivoirienne</i> Ivorian Radio and Television
UN	United Nations
UNOCI	United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire <i>Opération des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire</i>

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1 Introduction

As the period of decolonization began in Africa, new sovereign states arose from the predetermined boundaries created by the European colonizers. These internationally acknowledged states experienced their newfound independence very differently, and many remained closely tied with their former colonizers. In Côte d'Ivoire, Western Africa, the changes over the past decades have been vast. The country appeared to integrate all parts of society, from the ethnic minorities and immigrants to the foreign workers, into a successful and thriving nation. As a former French colony, the state remained closely tied both politically and economically with their former colonizer in the first decades after decolonization. Quickly coined the 'economic miracle child' of Africa, the state experienced a seemingly smooth transition to independence. However, after the death of the country's sole ruler since independence, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, in 1993, the state rapidly dissolved into a crisis with continuing political instability and economic decline. Often referenced to as an established powerhouse and an example of the continent's positive development, it was with awe that people watched as Côte d'Ivoire was thrown into a violent conflict in September of 2002. The conflict, between the government and a united rebel front known as the *Force Nouvelles*, left one of the few stable countries of West Africa geographically split in the middle. Côte d'Ivoire was subsequently thrown into a period of great instability and called for assistance from France, who had been a longstanding and close ally since the independence of Côte d'Ivoire in 1960. With a French military base in the country from the signing of an *accord de coopération* (agreement of cooperation), promising French military assistance in the fight against external as well as internal threats to the stability of the nation, the government of Côte d'Ivoire appeared to envision a swift solution to the powerful uprising in the north of the country. However, what followed was clearly not in accordance with the Ivorian government's plans. France responded with low level technical assistance and not the military man-power that the Ivorian government expected. The Ivorian national army was therefore in no position to defeat the rebel

uprising that continuously increased its stronghold of northern Côte d'Ivoire. France did, however, respond positively to a request from the Ivorian government and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to participate in a monitoring force to make sure that the warring parties upheld the ceasefire agreement signed in October 2002. Now in an interposition between the government and the *Forces Nouvelles*, the French troop's presence began to anger the Ivorian population. Both the Ivorian government and the population at large felt that France had not answered to the bilateral agreement of cooperation, and thus did not honour their part of the agreement. Further, the French media coverage of the crisis appeared to the Ivorian population as biased in favour of the *Forces Nouvelles*. So when the French forces attacked an Ivorian Air Force base in November 2004, it brought the animosity to a heightened level. Ivorian accusations of French neo-colonialism began to surface already at the beginning of the crisis, at the time when France decided not to intervene. The Ivorian population viewed French presence and actions to be in breach of their nation's sovereign right. The local government accused France of helping the rebels in a mission to overthrow the President of Côte d'Ivoire, and the brotherly gestures and kind words between the Elysée and the Ivorian President has been replaced with harsh words and a cold shoulder. Hence, the French-Ivorian relationship has become tarnished as a result of Ivorian accusations of neo-colonialism and of growing French annoyance with what they consider insulting claims.

There are many theoretical contributions that could be applied to this conflict in order to better understand the relationship at work; however, there is one theory that stands out as more suitable for an analysis of the Ivorian crisis, than others. Johan Galtung's structural theory of imperialism builds on the central idea of a situation's 'harmony of interest', between a Center nation and a Periphery nation. A general French presence in Côte d'Ivoire may not strike many as anything out of the ordinary, much due to the history between the two countries. Thus, Galtung's theoretical framework will be an important tool for which to study the Ivorian crisis, because of

the longstanding and harmonious relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire. I will return to a more thorough analysis of this in chapter 4.

Based on the abovementioned facts and arguments, it seems evident that there is more “under the surface” in this conflict, than meets the common eye. It is therefore the intent of this study to look more closely at the Ivorian conflict and attempt to answer the research question; *how are we to understand the strong French presence in Côte d'Ivoire from 2002-2007?* By viewing both sides of the conflict and taking an objective stand to the topic at hand, the goal is to come as close as possible to answering this question, using Galtung's theoretical framework, case studies, fieldwork and other available sources of information.

Two cases have been selected for close analysis, because of the significant impact these have had on the French-Ivorian relationship since the beginning of the crisis. Moreover, these cases will be analyzed within the theoretical framework of neo-imperialism defined by Johan Galtung, as introduced above. This framework has been chosen due to the way its structure accurately portrays France's role in Africa in colonial times; the historical strong-hold France has had in Francophone Africa, in the region of West Africa and especially involvement in multiple coups and conflicts in former colonies. Lastly, through a triangulation of the information gathered from interviews, participant observations, and primary and secondary documents, this study will attempt to critically analyse the situation and answer the research question at hand.

1.1 Côte d'Ivoire

The republic of Côte d'Ivoire is situated in the western part of Sub-Saharan Africa, bordering to Mali and Burkina Faso in the north, the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean in the south, and to the east lays Ghana and in the west is Liberia and Guinea (CIA 2006). The boundaries of the country were drawn up in the nineteenth century by the French colonizer during their establishment of new French

protectorates. Côte d'Ivoire became a French colony first time in 1893, and subsequently a part of the Federation of French West Africa in 1904. From the period of 1904 until 1958, Côte d'Ivoire was ruled from Paris. Following the Second World War and an ensuing change in the international power structures, Côte d'Ivoire experienced changes in their power structures as well. In 1956, France established an elected territorial government in the colony, and shortly after, in 1958, the beginning of *Republique de la Côte d'Ivoire* emerged. The country finally became independent from France in 1960.

1.2 The French Colonial Legacy

Karin Dokken (2000) states in her article *Frankrike og Afrika ved tusenårsskiftet* (France and Africa at the turn of the Century) that to fully understand the relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire one needs to take a closer look at their past history. The history between the two nations, coupled with policies implemented in the period of decolonization, provide good insight to the continued French stronghold and influence. There were especially two colonial policies that have left a significant mark on Côte d'Ivoire, namely the assimilation process and the *mission civilatrice*. It is essential to grasp the complexity of these policies and the vast areas of the Ivorian state they influenced before analysing the situation, since the French legacy is still evident in many different ways.

The close political ties were rooted in the French establishment of prominent 'allies' within the Ivorian society during the period of colonialization. These were people of power or influence in the Ivorian society, who were hand-picked by France and educated in the French language. By being offered strategic positions in Ivorian politics during colonization, these individuals subsequently got the opportunity to form the ruling elite when Côte d'Ivoire became independent in 1960. An excellent example of this was the former President of Côte d'Ivoire, Fèlix Houphouët-Boigny, who was among the fortunate Ivoirians who rose to prominence during the colonial

era. In a complex power network based on class emphasis and personified relationships, Dokken (2000) argues that the selection of Houphouët-Boigny was a conscious choice made by France in order to maintain a close relationship between the two states and to maintain a direct link to the head of power in the newly independent country. And certainly, the relationship between the Elysée and the Ivorian head of state have remained close, both on a personal as well as political level, just as it had been during decades of colonialization. Moreover, France contributed to the establishment of an Ivorian state by offering technical assistance to train government personnel. By teaching the Ivorian government officials ‘the ropes’, the assistants contributed to how the Ivorian state was formed post-independence. In fact, the President of Côte d’Ivoire still maintains French advisors as a part of his closest staff to this day (Toussaint 2007).

As a justification for the significant French presence on the African continent, the strategy of *une mission civilisatrice et libératrice*¹ was implemented. This strategy included several measures, such as the implementation of a public schooling system in the French language, communication (e.g. infrastructure, transportation, and news-communication), the Franc-zone, and military service (Græger 2008). The two most noticeable measures today are the official language (French) and the currency; *Communaute Financiere Africaine* (CFA) Franc (U.S. Department of State, October 2006). The way France led the Francophone African states into the monetary system of the CFA was, according to Renou (2002:11), a move to preserve monetary stability in the region. It was also a means for France to control the countries’ money supplies, their monetary and financial regulations, their banking activities, their credit allocations, and ultimately their budgetary and economic policies. The newly independent states, however, did not impact the monopolistic situation of France, rather a significant share of the trade, marketing, and shipping activities remained entirely controlled by the former colonizer. According to the United Nations

¹ The French concept of “westernizing” the colonial population was in accordance with the assimilation politics of France in Africa.

Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO 1986c:4-5), “most industrial and commercial enterprises were under foreign ownership, mostly French, and because the government decided to open up the economy and allow participation by foreign investors, almost a quarter of domestic savings was channelled out of the country in the form of wage transfers and dividends”. There is therefore no doubt about the importance of French presence, through managerial, technical and business expertise, as well as investments, on Côte d’Ivoire (Jackson & Rosberg 1982). In other words, the Ivorian economy was almost fully reliant on foreign presence; there was little domestic economic activity and much of the potential surplus of the state was channelled out of the country. France, on the other hand, enjoyed full access to a seemingly abundant source of natural resources due to its powerful and influential position.

After decolonization, France implemented in 1961 several *accords de défense* with Côte d’Ivoire (Collett 2003, Dokken 2000). These accords opened up for French intervention in case of Ivorian military conflicts, as well as the right to maintain several army bases on Ivorian soil. Further, the agreements gave them access to strategic raw materials by which France retained the right to purchase on a first-priority basis. The agreements also restricted the Ivorian state on the selling of these resources to other countries in the name of ‘common defence interests’ (Renou 2002). The treaties were signed during the reign of Houphouët-Boigny, and there seems to be a consensus among scholars and others that they were signed by the President to ensure continued French support for his government (Collett 2003). The current presence of 43rd BIMA, the French military base in Côte d’Ivoire, is an outcome of these accords.

1.3 From Political Calm to Times of Turmoil

From the time of independence and until 1993, Fèlix Houphouët-Boigny was the President of the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire. His reign was a prosperous period for the

nation, first and foremost economically, though also in regards to social calm and peace. He retained a close political alliance with France and was regarded as a respectable leader both internationally, regionally and on a national level. When the President died in 1993, his death triggered events that would impact the country heavily; a withering relationship with France, in addition to a declining economy, drove the country into political instability and created immense social turmoil.

As a result of an increasing international pressure for democratization, Côte d'Ivoire opened up and legalized political opposition in 1990 (BBC 2006). The effects of this multiparty system was political disagreement and competition between the parties², that further laid the foundation for ethno-regional and religious-based politics. President Bédié, the successor of Houphouët-Boigny and the new head of the *Parti Democratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), introduced the concept of 'Ivorianité'³ to the political scene. This concept stigmatized and divided the population, and further increased the exclusion of the northern population⁴. Following 'Ivorianité', the government implemented a new policy placing restrictions⁵ on voters as well as the political candidates to prevent political opposition from running and potentially winning the elections. Subsequently, the 1995 election was boycotted by the two main opposition parties, FPI and RDR, and Bédié remained in power, though with a weakened power base.

In the period between 1999 and 2002, there were many attempts at free elections, as well as coup d'états, in order to restore stability in Côte d'Ivoire. Most attempts,

² The new fractions within Ivorian politics included the *Rassemblement de Républicains* (RDR), headed by the former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara, which comprised the largest opposition party to PDCI, and secondly, the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI) headed by Laurent Gbagbo. Both these parties sought to challenge the former stronghold of PDCI.

³ It was a political concept of 'Ivorianess' – constituting who was a true Ivorian and who was not. It was conceived and instrumentalized to prevent the leading opposition leader, Alassane Ouattara, from running for office.

⁴ There was a dominant notion that the northern part of Côte d'Ivoire was predominantly immigrants, as a result of the labour-immigration during the period of Houphouët-Boigny, from neighbouring countries.

⁵ In order to vote or run for office, one was now required to be an Ivorian citizen, and for both parents to be Ivorian by birth. Furthermore, RDR and Alassane Ouattara utilized this political power-play to mobilize the part of the population that was increasingly being excluded.

however, were unsuccessful due to political disagreement and continuous debates around what constituted ‘a real Ivorian’. The attempted coup in September 2002, on the other hand, differed from the previous as it was for the most part carried out by an angry mob of demobilized soldiers. But this time, the coup took a different turn and forced the country down a new and violent path.

The failed coup d’état spiralled into an armed conflict which more or less divided the country and political scene into two camps. Baégas and Marshall-Fratani (2007:81) describe the two opposing parties as “one the one hand, a protean rebellion occupying the north of the country, seconded by the major opposition parties,....., and on the other, the Gbagbo regime, seconded by the “patriotic galaxy,” a nebulous group of youth organizations and militias, largely controlled by power holders at the presidency and in Laurent Gbagbo’s party, the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI)”. The *Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d’Ivoire* (MPCI) quickly gained control over the northern territory of the country, and further allied itself with two new rebel fractions from the western part of Côte d’Ivoire, *Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO) and *Mouvement pour la justice et la paix* (MJP). Together they formed the *Forces Nouvelles*. Their united cause was the removal of President Gbagbo, a review of the constitution, and lastly; a new round of elections (U.S. Department 2007, BBC 2006, ICG 2003, and IRIN 2002). With supervision from the President of Togo, a ceasefire agreement was reached in October 2002 that paved the way for a Zone of Confidence⁶ between the warring North and South, a zone controlled by the French Licorne and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) forces employed to the conflict. The agreement was unfortunately not enough to settle the conflict, since one of the central issues still remained unresolved; the negotiators claimed that an armed rebellion could only make military claims, not political demands. The *Forces Nouvelles*’ request for removal of President Gbagbo was seen as a political demand, and thus refused. Thus France, whom was

⁶ “A ceasefire line policed by multinational forces under UN mandate...[that] marks the geographical division of the country” (Baégas and Marshall-Fratani 2007:81).

already militarily present in the country through their post-colonial commitment, extended their involvement by offering to host peace talks in January the following year (ICG 2003). The conflicting parties were brought together in a French led peace process held at Linas-Marcoussis in France. The Ivoirian political forces met on January 23, 2003, for a round-table conference hosted by the French President, in an attempt to secure the future of Côte d'Ivoire. The outcome of the conference, later termed the Linas-Marcoussis Accord (LMA), resulted in a power-sharing government in which the *Forces Nouvelles* were granted several ministerial positions. The reunification period following the LMA was both complicated and long, so much so that the accord collapsed in September 2003 when the rebels officially left the government in protest to the behaviour of President Gbagbo and the slow implementation process. Even though France had become a central political and military actor in the Ivorian crisis since it broke out in September 2002, according to the International Crisis Group (2003:27), their influence and power had somewhat declined due to allegations of "complicity and partiality" from both sides. The outcome of the LMA was in the eyes of Gbagbo's supporters regarded as a victory for the rebellion, and a sign that France was directly affiliated with them. Some even went as far as to argue that the rebellion and attempted coup was "financed and masterminded by France to protect its economic interests" (ICG 2003:27).

In November 2004, the country was thrown into a new period of violent unrest that caused a major setback to the peace process. Elections were postponed several times and the process of disarmament never completed. However, in March 2007, following a series of closed-door negotiations headed by President Compaore of Burkina Faso, an agreement was reached between President Gbagbo and *Forces Nouvelles*. A transitional government is now in place, headed by President Gbagbo, and with Guillaume Soro, the head of *Forces Nouvelles*, as the Prime Minister. Even though this has restored some of the peace to Côte d'Ivoire, a new and official election, in addition to an extensive process of national identification, has yet to be completed.

2 Methodology

A qualitative research approach has been the natural point of departure in this study of the French presence in the Côte d'Ivoire conflict, seeing as the Ivorian outcry of injustice is what triggered the interest for this study to begin with. A qualitative approach to the phenomenon, and the lessons learned from applying the appropriate research instruments, has influenced the improvement of my research question and thus the subsequent analysis and conclusion. In this study I will be looking to examine the following research question; *how are we to understand the strong French presence in Côte d'Ivoire from 2002-2007?*

2.1 A Qualitative Research Design

Critical qualitative research requires a multifaceted approach, and this study has incorporated a holistic approach in which the perspectives from all the data gathered has been important and useful for the case study analysis. The study asks how we are to understand the French presence in Côte d'Ivoire, and the use of case studies are appropriate when looking to answer “how” and “why” questions (Yin 2003) to a contemporary context, over which the researcher has no control. According to Yin (2003:2), the need for case studies arises with the desire to understand complex social phenomena. Moreover, a case study may also be useful in order to say something general about such a phenomenon. Bennet (2004:21) defines a case study as “the investigation of a well defined aspect of a historical happening that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than the historical happening itself”. He further defines a case as “an instance of a class of events of interest to the investigation, such as an instance of revolution, type of government regime, kind of economic system, or personality type” (2004:21). The two cases in this study that have been selected for analysis using Galtung's theoretical framework are subsequently an event and a process; the military happenings in November 2004 and the general French press

coverage of the crisis respectively (see section 3.4). These cases have, along with the above mentioned theoretical framework, been selected to illustrate a part of “the complexity of the....phenomenon in question” (George 1979:143). More importantly, however, they have been selected on the background of the information gathered throughout the study, in where it became very clear that these events have had a key impact on the French-Ivorian relationship.

2.2 Research Methods

The qualitative research methods applied for this research have been selected to best fit the scope of this study, within the confined limitations of what has been possible. The research has had clear financial and time limitations, and this has further been taken into consideration throughout the research process, and thus subsequently in the analysis. Moreover, this topic is relatively unexplored, which therefore has had a limiting effect on the information available. Much of the written documentation and research has been conducted in French, which has posed quite a challenge. Nevertheless, this study has adjusted its methods accordingly to compensate for the mentioned limitations. Further, there are always obstacles or limitations present when conducting research, be they access to information, an appropriate theoretical framework, or something else. As a researcher, the goal is always to strive towards a good product by setting the standards in the research design and working to obtain data free from influences that may taint the conclusion.

2.2.1 Fieldwork

A fieldwork was conducted in the city of Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, in November of 2007. The fieldtrip had a positive influence on this study as it allowed me to understand the nature of the complex situation and social processes at work that I would not have been able

to without being physically present. Through interviews and participant observation I was able to achieve a better understanding of and appreciation for the different opinions of the situation. However, when conducting research where the field site is located in a conflict zone, issues may arise and threaten the security of the researcher. Lee-Treweek and Linkogle emphasize “the consideration of the consequences of physical threat is of paramount importance to staying alive in the field” (2000:11). Though I never felt that I found myself in any position of real danger, the sensitivity of the research topic and the fact that it was still a burning topic during the fieldwork, affected the access to the preferred range of informants. Nevertheless, the effect of the security situation on the ability to get the information required will be discussed more in depth at a later point in this chapter.

2.2.2 The Challenge of Access and Equal Representation

“For the topic to be appropriate for qualitative research, it must be grounded in the lives of the conversational partners; it is their reality that you will eventually convey” (Rubin 1995:48). Taking this statement into account, it is essential to be attentive when selecting subjects for an interview process. This is because these individuals will provide key information central to further investigations, as well as possible conclusions drawn from the study. Thus, the issue of access rises as an important aspect of the research design. It is imperative to ask the question of who the people being interviewed are and what kind of an informant this person will be. How will their social and cultural background impact the information provided to you? Moreover, there is a need for a variety among the subjects interviewed, and this study has attempted to best capture the complexity of the situation on the ground and to achieve a fair representation of the parties of interest. Thus, the informants varied greatly in their social and cultural backgrounds, ranging from Ivorian nationals and foreigners residing in Abidjan, to French nationals residing in Côte d’Ivoire. They represented people of current and former political positions, high ranking army personnel, journalists, and the average citizens. However, it has proven to be difficult to get access to a voice representing the French official stand on this issue. An

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interview request with the French embassy in Abidjan was denied, and thus the information which represents the French official response and stand on their involvement in the conflict has been retrieved from the official government website of France, and other primary and secondary resources. Furthermore, there are additional difficulties attached to doing research on French colonial history, as their archives are quite difficult to get a hold of, much information is displaced and spread between different locations, deliberately destructed, and many are still classified (Kirk-Greene and Bach 1995). While conducting research on such a politically and socially controversial topic, it has been noticeably difficult to acquire certain information due to restricted access to the material. However, I will argue that the likelihood of gaining access to any French foreign policy documents stating any hidden agenda in the Ivory Coast is highly unlikely, if such a document has ever even existed. Nonetheless, as history has shown us, the most unlikely things to be put down on paper have often surfaced later in time, such as the policy of mass rape for the purpose of genocide put into writing in the Bosnian Ram plan by the Serb commanders (Vetlesen 2005), to name just one. In her article “Peacebuilding is a risky business: Norway’s role in the peace process in the Middle East, 1993-96”, Hilde Henriksen Waage (2004) commented on the difficulties with collecting all ‘the pieces of the puzzle’, and subsequently argued that she compensated for the lack of access to official and classified documents by conducting interviews. Karin Dokken (2000) has stated that to be able to understand the close relations between France and the Ivory Coast one has to look back at their past. Hence, by drawing on a wide variety of accessible sources, bearing in mind the historical relationship between France and Côte d’Ivoire, as well as between France and all of Francophone Africa, and through a varied group of interview subjects, I intend to compensate for the possible gap in available resources.

In the words of Vincent Wright (1992:Preface): “No book can pretend to capture in any detail the immensely rich and complex interplay of social, economic, political and psychological forces which comprise the political process”, or in this case a national conflict and external involvement. Further, the historian Edward Carr

sheds a light on the relationship between the data and the historian, arguing that “history reflects, consciously or unconsciously, our own position in time and is implicit in our answer to the broader question, what view we have on society” (Carr 1962:5). Hence, he emphasizes the impact a historian actually has and his or her interpretation of the facts themselves. Consequently, the need to be critical when conducting and analyzing archival data is significant. By analyzing the selected cases in light of the theoretical framework of neo-imperialism, this study will simply present a feasible angle from which one may understand the French presence and subsequent behaviour in Côte d’Ivoire, without claiming to hold the absolute truth.

2.2.3 Interviews

Qualitative interviews are useful when wanting to better understand a context by unravelling complicated relationships and events that gradually develop (Rubin 1995:51). In an explanatory study, an interview is a dialogue used for the purpose of acquiring information, and this purposeful conversation needs to have some structure to illuminate the issue at hand. A semi-structured, yet flexible interview is what I believe is most fruitful to this particular research. There is a need for structure as the research has an explicit purpose, but the flexibility provides the ability to explore new information and themes that surface in the different conversations. The structured basis of the interview derives from the preparation and background information gathered in the beginning of the research process, and consists of the leading, open-ended questions to be asked throughout the interview. This background information was acquired through primary and secondary data sources, such as country statistics and general information, newspaper articles, pamphlets, academic articles and books. The open-ended questions provided the interviewee with an opportunity to approach the question in the way they themselves saw fit, and not experiencing restrictions from the question presented to them.

Due to the previously mentioned time and financial constraints, there was especially one element of strength related to the open-ended interview approach that

was highly valued; the constant flow of information. The information that came from the interviews shed light on parts of the context I was neither aware of, nor have come across since, and it further helped in the selection of the cases to focus on for this study. The interviews proved to be the primary source for in-depth knowledge of not just the conflict and its personal impacts, but more so the context and the broader implications of the French-Ivorian relationship in a social, political and historical context (Rubin 1995). On the other hand, a clear limitation to these open-ended interviews was the follow-up and deeper documentation of the information gathered. There was, however, a lack of opportunity to do so.

Another potential obstacle to address in this study, and specifically in relation to the interviews, is language. In fact, it should be noted that this has indeed been a challenge in much of the data gathering, seeing that most of the coverage on this topic has been done in French. Language can be defined as verbal formulations transmitted either orally or in writing, but one can also say of language that it “describes a culture in its own terms” (Spradley 1979). The research question, as well as the subsequent methods, relies on some understanding of the French language, and thus knowledge of French can be argued to be of importance. Then again, there is a consensus among scholars that a strong research design can to a certain extent make up for insufficient language competence (Spradley 1979). In addition, it is important to mention that I possess adequate French language skills. Since this research has relied heavily on French sources of information, such as press-coverage and government websites, I acquired the aid of a former Norwegian Ambassador⁷ to Brussels who is perfectly fluent in the French language in order to make up for any inadequacies in my own translations.

When a researcher in the analytical process set in motion a translational process to explain what was observed in his own language, defined as ‘translation

⁷ Ambassador John Bjørnebye has served as the Norwegian Ambassador to Brussels, Tokyo, and Luxembourg. He has also been stationed in Paris, France while working for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

competence' (Spradley 1979), there will almost always be important elements lost in the process. This argument is further supported by Finnegan (1992) who states that the likelihood of a non-native researcher to "overlook local subtleties in the deployment of language" is especially high. As one can understand, according to these two statements there is a need for an extreme level of thorough knowledge to be able to rightfully study a subject when different languages apply. Hence, it seems possible that previously and historically conducted fieldwork in remote and untouched areas should be seriously questioned if these authors are right in their claim. Though I do not fully disagree with the arguments presented by these two authors, as I recognize the inherent need for language eligibility, I do believe that it is possible to conduct a study with partial knowledge of a language and the aid of an interpreter. The use of interpreters is of course an extension of this problem identified above. When a researcher becomes reliant on an interpreter for their research, he or she risks fail to grasp the interviewee's frame of reference and cultural reality (Spradley 1979), hence running the risk that the interpreter introduces a distorted reality and individually adding value to the information through selective bias. This brings up the question how one conducts and defends the conclusion of this research, if and when language competency may be an unavoidable obstacle? Firstly, some knowledge of the French language, and knowledge on the specific topic, functioned as a reference point and a quality assurance when using a translator. Secondly, the interpreter's⁸ background and his stand on the subject at hand were thoroughly familiar to the researcher, so that an attentive eye to subtle influence was well covered. Thirdly, most of the interview subjects were knowledgeable in the English language, which gave way for questions, or clarifications in this language, if needed. Lastly, and as suggested by Spradley (1979), it is helpful and important to design the ethnographic research questions so as to reduce the influence of the translation and to increase the quality of the result. Finally, I will argue that the question of language will always

⁸ The interpreter, whom for the purpose of this study will remain anonymous, is an Ivorian national. Born in Côte d'Ivoire, he moved to France in his teens. He now resides in Oslo, Norway, but travels frequently to France, and Côte d'Ivoire.

present a problem, whether being an insider or outsider, as both may consciously or unconsciously lose the essence or richness of the information when conducting a study.

3 Theoretical Framework

I have chosen the voice of the Ivorian people as the starting point for my thesis and thus begin with the Ivorian accusations of French neo-colonialism in Côte d'Ivoire. The body of literature that deal with the different epochs of colonialization is vast and may very well be overwhelming when trying to locate a theoretical framework through which to analyze the current situation in the country. Although neo-colonialism is a suitable framework, it is important to take a step back and look at this theory in a broader context. I have therefore divided the following chapter into four parts; 1) the international nation-state system and how this system functions as an overarching rule-governed structure, 2) the *Françafrique* network, 3) the theoretical framework of neo-imperialism, and 4) a summary and introduction of the approach chosen to analyse the selected cases. Firstly, since the international nation-state system is built on the notion of sovereignty, as well as certain rules and regulations, neo-imperialism is not by any means accepted and would be subject to international sanction. Secondly, I have incorporated what has been coined the *Françafrique* network to explain the choice of neo-imperialism as the appropriate research framework rather than neo-colonialism. Thirdly, I will introduce neo-imperialism and explain the fundamentals of this framework. For the sake of clarification, because these terms are most commonly treated as synonyms, I will shortly distinguish between colonialism and imperialism, and further clarify how these terms will be used in this study. Colonialism signals direct control over a country, with the transfer of people to exercise this direct control along with a significant settlement. Imperialism, on the other hand, is indirect control achieved without significant settlement (Stanford Encyclopaedia 2006). There is a disagreement between intellectuals over the consistency and use of these terms, a discussion I will return to below, more specifically in section 2.3. Furthermore, Johan Galtung's (1971) structural theory of imperialism will be introduced as the main theory used to analyse the two cases in point.

As an overarching dynamic framework, this context, and subsequent theory and concepts, will provide us with the opportunity to study the complex situation in Côte d'Ivoire, in addition to the necessary framework that can be applied to the situational analysis.

3.1 The international system

In order to understand why the Ivorian accusations of neo-colonialism are worth a closer look, one needs to lift these accusations up to another conceptual level, and try to understand what they mean in a larger context. Thus, it is important to begin with the international system of nation states and to study how this system is constructed and functions. It is through knowledge of this international system one sees why neo-imperialism is regarded as something inherently immoral.

Sovereignty is the notion of “supreme authority within a territory” (Stanford Encyclopaedia 2003). Since the sixteenth century, following the Peace of Westphalia⁹ in 1648, sovereignty has been understood as a two-folded concept; the inward- and outward understanding of sovereignty. Inward sovereignty is to say that the state has, within a clearly defined and legitimate territory, the full authority to pursue and create any laws or policies they deem necessary. Laws and policies are instruments that a state uses to civilize its internal affairs, and as a result of this supreme inward authority, there is no alternative for any individual or group to refuse to obey these decisions. Sovereignty of the state, outward looking, is the notion of non-interference from outside powers. Any attempt to violate this right, directly or indirect, is regarded as a breach of the states sovereignty and independence (Wallerstein 1999, Dean 2001). The interstate system of sovereign states expanded from Europe to the rest of the world in the centuries following Westphalia, and by the mid 20th-century,

⁹ The term Peace of Westphalia refers to the two peace treaties of Osnabrück and Münster, signed on May 15 and October 24, 1648. The Peace of Westphalia was a result of the first modern diplomatic congress and it initiated a new order in central Europe based on the concept of state sovereignty.

following the Second World War, the concept of sovereignty seemingly brought an end to the era of European colonial empires. Sovereignty is today a universal norm and “the only form of polity to cover the entire land surface of the globe” (Stanford Encyclopedia 2003). This feature of the modern political world, that constitutes self-governing political communities, is further protected in the Charter of the United Nations (United Nation 1945) article 2(4) and 2(7), which emphasise both the inward and outward sovereignty of all states within the framework of international law.

Consequently, the international scene has become what Wheeler (2000) defines as ‘the reciprocal recognition of sovereignty’, and this reciprocity has become one of the cornerstones on which our modern interstate system rests. Nations are constrained by these socially constructed rules that constitute their respective positions of authority. The nature of the international society is exactly the reason why states follow the rules, recognizing their obligation towards the other states in terms of having to explain their conduct when breaking the rules (Wheeler 2000).

Immanuel Wallerstein (1999) claims in his article “States? Sovereignty?” that no state has ever been neither truly inwardly nor outwardly autonomous; inward sovereignty is compromised by internal resistance towards the authorities. He alleges that the most powerful states in the interstate system have been ‘notorious’ at not reciprocating the sovereignty of weaker or smaller states by interfering in their affairs, coupled with the restraints following the presence of international law. From a realist perspective, and according to Wheeler 2000), governments in the international society are only interested in pursuing their own interest “while paying lip service to the rules”. It is the competitive nature of ‘the game’ that is the reason for why the players (state leaders) adhere to the rules, constantly attempting to play a game to their advantage, but at the same time avoiding moral condemnation and sanctions. Accordingly, a good player may always find a way to justify his or her position. (Wheeler 2000:23). So, who are these powerful states? One way to define power is to measure it by “results”. Wallerstein (1999) explains “the powerful” to be the state that ends up getting its way and succeed in reaching its goals. Power does not need to be

demonstrated in a loud or threatening manner, but is usually established in a quiet, manipulative and soft-spoken way. In this realist framework, one of the principal objectives of the state is still to advance its position and power, and the primary characteristic of this struggle is territorial conquest (Fawcett 2002).

3.2 The Françafrique Network

Edward Carr (1962) claims that understanding the past is the key to understanding the future. Though Côte d'Ivoire had a special relationship to their former colonizer, the country was still one of many colonies that France maintained a special association to and was included in what became known as Francophone Africa.

Decolonization is defined by Samora Machel as follows: “to decolonize a state means essentially to dismantle the political, administrative, cultural, financial, economic, educational, juridical and other systems which as an integral part of the colonial state, were solely designed to impose foreign domination and the will of the exploiters on the masses” (Andereggen 1994:61). What can be said in the aftermath of the French decolonization, in light of the above definition, is that the decolonization that occurred in the former Franco-African colonies was far from traditional. Instead, it was a continuation of a system that had been in place for centuries, though slightly transformed. “France’s policy of decolonization was carried out with spectacular speed and smoothness, and in a general atmosphere of cooperative comprehension” (Andereggen 1994:61, Hargreaves 1995). The establishment of the close connection between the colonies and France came to life during the colonial times. President Charles de Gaulle sought to maintain this close relationship and to ensure a continuation of the strong French presence on the continent (Hargreaves 1995) also in post-colonial times. According to Andereggen (1994:75), there were four main motives behind this strategy and these would lay the grounds for the later French involvement in the former colonies. Firstly, the need for a

stable and reliable source for strategic raw materials, accompanied with the interest in new and growing markets, represented the economic motive. Secondly, the established bond from a common cultural and linguistic heritage represented a cultural motive; while thirdly, the international pursuit for positions of power in the world hierarchy represented a political and influential motivation. Lastly, the feeling of responsibility following decades of close interaction and the desire to follow up on what they had started represented a final motivation. Especially this close and personal connection would prove to become one of the most important elements of what became known as “*la coopération*”.

The continuous close ties between the Presidents, ministers and business men have always played an important role in the relationship between France and its former African colonies. These relationships have been referred to as a form of ‘red carpet treatment’ and have in the eyes of some been seen as a condition for a favourable treatment of this elite, both financially and politically (Andereggen 1994, Lombardi 2007). Jacques Foccart was the first secretary general of this close network known as ‘*la Communauté Français*’: the embodiment of de Gaulle’s personalized relationship. It was like a system; all-embracing. It included family problems, informants, French police, military, intelligence, and lastly businesses. It “distinguished itself by its longevity, continuity, steadfastness, and strict secrecy” (Andereggen 1994:77, Lombardi 2007). President Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d’Ivoire is said to be the epitome of this tactical system of relationships. On the contrary to what many believe, the term *Françeafrique* was coined by the former Ivorian President to describe what he regarded as a natural and complementary relationship between France and Francophone Africa (Ruscio 2008). According to popular opinion, it was François-Xavier Verschave who coined the term *Françafrique*, a term with negative connotations often used to underline the close connection between France and her ‘client’; i.e. the francophone African states. It also became a term symbolising the close relationships across politics and professions, bringing together presidents and entrepreneurs. Andrew Wallis notes the irony behind

this well used term, which is pronounced ‘*France-a-fric*’, bearing in mind that ‘*fric*’ is a French slang expression for money (2006:11).

The close relationships also had a strong connection to the apparatus put into place during the decolonization where France provided the selected leaders with the means of support and the right instruments to get them into power. Ziemer (1995:97) claims that these leaders and their parties became a hindrance for proper independence and for the accurate representation of the popular majority. President Charles De Gaulle was according to many the driving force behind the creation of the foundation on which the French relations with its former African colonies rests (Hargreaves 1995). The system that was put in place to work out the French African strategy after the independence of the former colonies was the *Ministère de la coopération et du développement* (Ministry of Cooperation and Development). The Ministry was created to have a desk where the decisions on policy implementation for the newly independent states could be made. It was also responsible for lending out key technical personnel to the newly independent states, and these could be placed within the close sphere of the president or as an advisor within the different ministries. It was the French experts and advisors who pushed for a French approach and guided African decision makers (Hargreaves 1995, Lombardi 2007). According to Wallis (2006:11), this desk has also been nicknamed the ‘Ministry of the African Neo-Colonies’ as “its decisions seemed to reflect the interests of French politicians rather than the good of the states in which it operated”. Wallis, along with other scholars, argues that the real power over French African affairs lay not with the ministries, but with the President himself. Under de Gaulle, the Ministry of Cooperation and Development worked almost solely with African affairs. The creation of a secret and selectively elected consultative body named *Cellule Africaine* (the Africa Cell) by President François Mitterrand, and later run by the son of Mitterrand, was a further sign of the individualistic power over the African affairs of France. In his memoirs, *Reflexions sur la politique extérieure de la France*, Mitterrand presented his view on Francophone Africa as “a French-speaking territory that must be maintained as such and as a natural preserve of France, off-limits to other

foreign powers” (Anderegggen 1994:84). Anderegggen (1994) alleges that the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has never worked much with African affairs because Francophone-Africa has never been regarded as foreign countries.

La Françafrique has by many been regarded as a form of clientilism (Constantin 1995:183, Renou 2002:9-10); a paternalistic or mafia-style relationship. References are then made to the creation of the *Ministère de la coopération et du développement* and to the African policies being ‘*domaine réservé*’ (private matter) of the President. The relationship was viewed to be built on reciprocity. The French would contribute with “official” support for the people in power through posing for pictures, paying and accepting visits, and providing military-, financial-, and diplomatic support. In return, France would receive support by the United Nations (UN) block, the Afro-Asia group, especially after disagreements and debates on French involvement in wars on the continent (Constantin 1995:185). However, as emphasised by all, the relationship of reciprocity was not an equal partnership, with emphasis on the difference in strength and needs. The most significant element of the decolonization process between France and the former African colonies that drastically stood apart from similar processes elsewhere, were the official *accord de coopération* (agreements of cooperation) that were signed post-independence. The countries of Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Mauritania, Madagascar, Niger, Dahomey, Gabon, Congo, Central African Republic, Chad and Togo all signed extended agreements with France that included defence, technical, financial, economic, political and diplomatic assistance. Cameroon and Upper Volta signed all these agreements with France, except the full range of the defence agreements. Consequently, they accept military aid but do not allow French troops to be stationed on their soil. Mali only signed agreements of economic and technical assistance (Anderegggen 1994:63, Laursen 1984). The unique features of these agreements of cooperation that has caught the attention of nationals in the various signatory countries, as well as intellectuals and others on an international level, is the right for France to have priority in the purchase of strategic raw materials from the cooperating countries, such as uranium, thorium, lithium, beryllium, helium, oil and natural gas (Anderegggen 1994:63, Hargreaves 32

1995), and the ability to restrict sales to other countries if it is in the interest of common defence. Dokken (2000) claims that Côte d'Ivoire is contributing to the French wealth through this lucrative deal, in where France has the first priority in the acquisition of important natural resources. The former French Minister of Foreign Assistance, Bernard Debre, gave an interview in the French magazine *Jeune Afrique* as a response to comments on the strong French presence in Africa and to Western diplomats' unofficial remarks about "prestige and business" where he stated that "when we aid a country we must have a minimum in return". "For France, Africa is also a market. Not a captive market, certainly, but not a sieve either" (French 1996). It is also important to clarify what the defence agreements entail, as they have been subject to many debates around the French military presence and involvement on the continent. These defence agreements do differ in the wording from country to country, but they are all a manifesto of cooperation in which the African signatories may ask France for military aid and assistance in cases of internal and external defence. The defence agreements do not specify what defines a threat or an attack from the outside, nor necessarily what defines public disorder within a state; however, it does grant France the right to decline the request for assistance (Laursen 1984:26-28). A differing opinion, shared among many African nationals and international intellectuals, view these agreements of cooperation as renewed establishment of authority and superiority of France in Africa in spite of the international sovereignty that had been granted them.

There has been great disagreement within the French political arena on whether the French involvement in Francophone-Africa has been in line with or in breach of the sovereignty of the African countries. One such incident that caused massive disagreement was under the period of President Giscard d'Estaing, when he in 1978 involved French troops in the Central African Republic with the aim to remove Emperor Bokassa from power (Andereggen 1994). Elements within French politics have also made a political case out of what they regarded as French neo-imperialism. Socialist Jean-Pierre Cot, the first minister of *Ministère de la coopération et du développement* under President Mitterrand, called for a change in the personalized

relationships and in French financial aid to Francophone Africa “by being less conniving with the African heads of state” (Anderegggen 1994:82). Cot was later forced to resign in 1982, only a year after he came to the ministry.

At the Franco-African summit at La Baule in 1990, national and international cries for democracy in several African countries were increasing in strength and, according to Toulabor (1995); the French could no longer be seen supporting authoritarian regimes. A change occurred in the French Africa-strategy with Mitterrand at the forefront, calling for a process of democratization in Francophone Africa and promising increased aid to the countries that did. Toulabor (1995) claims that the French aid policy appear to have been created to uphold the French influence and strong-hold. In the two years preceding the meeting in La Baule, the total aid from France had accumulated to 8.2 billion dollars (Renou 2002:13), a strain on the economy of the donor country. Subsequently, the French authority would have to give in to some of the international pressure, competition, and interest in the region. France had occupied a dominant position in 26 Sub-Saharan countries (Hugon 1995:128). Franco-African trade slowly declined, and France was no longer the primary trading partner for many countries. However, the position as one of the continent’s main partners is still a fact, considering the totality of its aid, trade, and military cooperation (Renou 2002).

3.3 Neo-Imperialism

The two previous sub-chapters have the important role of providing the context to which this study will apply the discourse of neo-imperialism in this following chapter.

The idea of a state silently fighting to maintain influence and primary position in a foreign country does not appear to be implausible when you review the history of the nation states. The link between territory, natural resources and war has been very familiar to many a historian throughout time. There are still conflicts left to be

resolved where territorial interests and disagreements are at the core of the hostilities, such as in Israel-Palestine and Eritrea-Ethiopia, just to name a few. Wars where natural resources, like oil, minerals and agricultural crops, play an important role are also visible on the international scene in countries such as Iraq and the ‘race’ to secure ownership in the Arctic. However, as emphasized by Fawcett (2002), there are clear and fundamental changes in the way in which these ‘wars’ are fought today in comparison to a century ago because of the founding notion of the interstate system, which is sovereignty. Fawcett (2002:24) argues that even though “the nature and purpose of war has changed for some states, conflict and competition over territory and resources continue to dominate the balance of war and peace. They remain central to our understanding of wars between and within states: very few conflicts have *no* territorial or resource component”. Decolonization is an example of this; newly independent states gaining control over territory and resources that was claimed to be ‘rightfully theirs’. However, the newly independent states would quickly find themselves subsumed in a new game of rivalry following the emergence of the Cold War. “In this regard one cannot but note the paradoxical transformation of superpower anti-imperialism into a form of superpower neo-imperialism in which rivalry over territory and resources once more enjoyed pride of place” (Fawcett 2002:28). And this rivalry took another form when the Cold War-era was over. Not only for those who fight today’s wars, but also for those who may appear to be on the fence or for those who intervene, there are deep territorial and resource implications. Territorial and resource dominance can translate into control over markets, institutions, industrial sector, communications or security.

Historically, European empires have been in a dominating position over the non-European world, mostly due to phenomena such as imperialism and colonialism (Marks 2002). Traditionally, imperialism has been associated with the idea of exploitation, structural inequality, economic monopoly, territorial expansion and military control. In his book, *Imperialism in the twentieth century*, Archibald Thornton argues that it is the imperial policy that ‘enables a metropolis to create and maintain an external system of effective control’ (Thornton 1978:3). The channels

through which this control could be concerted could be political, economical, strategic, cultural, religious, or ideological. The ‘imperialist’ would be the individual who actively sought to endorse the national interests abroad. Notably, an important element in his reasoning is that there will be no evidence of policies openly defined as imperialistic, nor will there ever be any political mentioning of such policies. In Côte d’Ivoire, there was a significant settlement of people in place to maintain the French strategic interests. Developing the country to support French economic interests included, amongst other things, politics of assimilation to ensure French cultural and ideological domination.

It is, however, important to distinguish between the two phenomena reference to above, and as Smith (2003) argues that one should not misread colonialism for being the same as imperialism. Not a necessary result of or addition to imperialism, colonialism is the occupation and direct government of one country by another. Smith puts forth the argument that the two differ on a conceptual level, wherein imperialism can be understood as primarily an economic concept and colonialisms primary domain is the social and political sphere. It was in the late nineteenth century, during the period later termed ‘new-imperialism’, that colonialism became commonly associated with imperialism. According to Susan Marks (2003), who does not share the same distinction between imperialism and colonialism as Smith, imperialism does not initially refer to the political system of the colonial government, but rather to a specific economic system in which the key is the penetration and control over foreign markets. The traditional subsistence production in Côte d’Ivoire was developed by France into a high-level production to benefit French needs and the French export-market. As the main, or only, trading partner of Côte d’Ivoire, France secured access to and control of all the necessary and strategic resources she needed. Marks (2002) further claim that if modern imperialism was only to include the political system, all former colonies would have experienced full independence after decolonization. She points to the economic and material subordination under which the former colonies continued to function. Like Marks, Rajen Harshé (1997) argues that it is impossible to surpass the close connection between capitalism and imperialism. Smith (2003:23)

writes that “imperialism does not necessarily mean taking political control of a country”, and thus, she claims those who argue imperialism in the post-colonial era are referring to the continued economic connections and frequent exploitation of developing countries occurring without political occupation. Offiong (1982) theorizes that the end of colonialism was an indirect result of the realization that it was not necessary to be present through direct political control in order to ‘provide lucrative investment outlets’. Today, France is still the main foreign player in the Ivorian economy, with ownership of somewhere between 40-45% of the total capital in Ivorian firms. Of foreign investments, which represent approximately ¼ of the total capital in Ivorian enterprises, French investments constitute between 55-60% of the total foreign investments (US Department of State 2008).

Critiques of the economic theories on imperialism are many and some of the core arguments are; firstly, the direction of trade from the end of the nineteenth century and onwards was not predominantly between Europe and the colonies, but rather between the European states themselves, as well as with North America and Australia. Secondly, trade with the colonies only made up a small proportion of the total trade for most settler states. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise and distinguish between what is being traded, seeing that the trade between Europe and its colonies may have been small in size but would still be of great importance to the recipients. As stated above in the previous sub-chapter, France secured access to strategic raw-materials, such as uranium, oil, and natural gas, that in size may have been small compared to import quanta from other European countries, but that played a greater significance and were vital for French wealth and political importance. Uranium is, as an example, what provides France with the ability to continue and expand its nuclear power (Dokken 2000:241) that not only functions as the largest source of energy for the French population, but also indirectly contributes to the French political strength on the international arena. Moreover, according to Robinson (1984), there are discrepancies in the theory that imperialism is a natural result of industrial capitalism. If this was true, he argues, why were the colonial empires abandoned at a time when its value was at an all time high? Thirdly, to reduce

colonialism down to only economic pressure would be to disregard all the other existing forces and interests ingrained in the movement of imperialism, such as diplomatic, strategic, geopolitical, economic, cultural, and racial forces. Fourth, and lastly, the strategic, protective and preventative element of imperialism must be reiterated, as competition for territory is another aspect of the international competition for power and influence. A good example of this is the struggle over territory in West Africa, between the British and the French in an attempt to get the regional 'upper hand' (Smith 2003).

Neo-colonialism, or neo-imperialism according to many, is said to be many things, and in 1961, at the Third All-African People's Conference in Cairo, a list of ways in which this form of indirect control may manifest itself was put forth: "(a) Puppet governments represented by stooges, and based on some chiefs, reactionary elements, anti-popular politicians, big bourgeois *compradors* or corrupted civil or military functionaries. (b) Regrouping of states, before or after independence, by an imperial power in federation or communities linked to that imperial power. (c) Balkanization as a deliberate political fragmentation of states by creation of artificial entities, such as, for example, the case of Katanga, Mauritania, Buganda, etc. (d) The economic entrenchment of the colonial power before independence and the continuity of economic dependence after recognition of national sovereignty. (e) Integration into colonial economic blocs which maintain the underdevelopment character of African economy. (f) Economic infiltration by a foreign power after independence, through capital investments, loans and monetary aids or technical experts, of unequal concessions, particularly those extending for long periods. (g) Direct monetary dependence as in those emergent independent states whose finances remain in the hands of and directly controlled by colonial powers. (h) Military bases sometimes introduced as scientific research stations or training schools introduces either before independence or as a condition for independence" (Offiong 1982:62).

Kwame Nkrumah (1971) analyzed neo-colonialism and made it well-known in his book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Regarded as a radical

liberal, Nkrumah claimed that the characteristics of neo-colonialism was the new form in which a state reinforced its power and strong-hold over the former colony without any evident direct control, since the economic systems and political policies were still being directed from the outside (Harshé 1997, Nkrumah 1971). A strong characteristic identified by Nkrumah is that “a State in the grip of neo-colonialism is not master of its own destiny” (1971: x). Nkrumah and Offiong (1982:64) explain the workings of contemporary imperialism to be a method actively working against the processes that are in place to strengthen newly independent states, including economic independence. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the *accord de cooperation* may be an example of an asymmetrical deal that excludes the opportunity of market competition, obviously not favoring Côte d’Ivoire. At this point, in what Offiong terms “the particular case of neo-colonialism”, power has officially been handed over to the new state, except that the people now in power are what in French is called *interlocuteurs valable*, or ‘negotiators worth talking to’. The dependency paradigm did not only focus on state actors but also the international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB).

An alternative view on imperialism and neo-imperialism is represented by Johan Galtung (1971). He states that imperialism is a general structure of indirect control and that this power of influence may originate from ‘any corner’. In other words, the indirect control can originate and be acted out through any of the five areas most commonly identified: political, economic, military, communication and cultural (1971: 91). In his article, *A Structural Theory of Imperialism*, Galtung presents a rather vast and complex theory on imperialism that includes the directions of power and influence, and the development of imperialism over three stages; past, present and future. The theory originates from “the two most glaring facts about this world”; the immense inequality within and between nations, and its resistance to change (1971:81). Accordingly, there will always be ‘Center¹⁰’ nations and ‘Periphery’

¹⁰ In this study I have chosen to operate with the same spelling of *Center* as Galtung used in his article (1971).

nations at the core of imperialism. It is constantly about relations and how these relations are converted into a system of exchange. Yet, in order to understand how this structure prevents a nation from developing into its fullest potential, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of this fundamental structure (see figure 2).

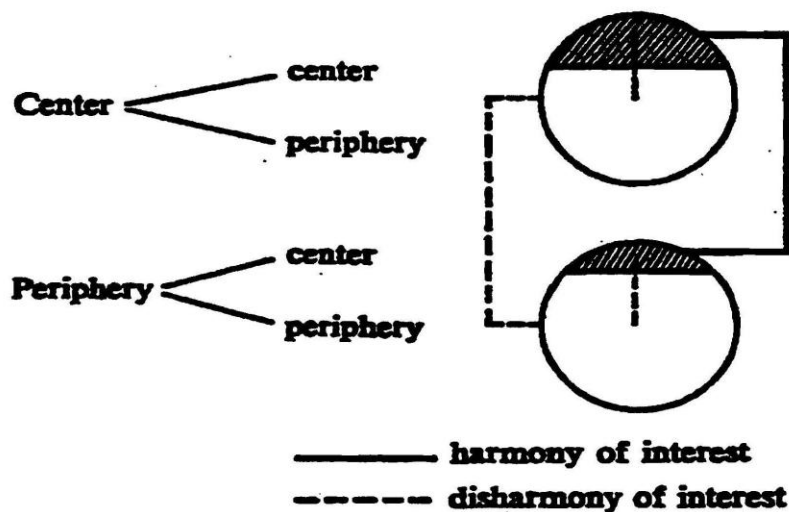


Fig. 1. The structure of imperialism

Figure 2 Galtung's structure of imperialism

(Galtung 1971:84)

Galtung defines imperialism as one way in which the Center nation has power over the Periphery nation. He emphasises three points that elaborates on this definition, though I will only focus on the first and most important factor, which is “[the] *harmony of interest* between the *center in the Center* and the *center in the Periphery*” (1971:83). It is important to note the distinction between what Galtung refers to as the Center nation and the Periphery nation, and to further be aware that there is a division within a nation between what he defines as the center and the periphery. Galtung proclaim the center to be more educated and richer than the periphery. In this study, based on a broader interpretation of Galtung's definition, it can be understood that the center consist of ‘people of power’ (e.g. politicians, business interests) tied together by common interests. This ‘elite’ may be considered

to cooperate in a fashion of “if you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours”, as a way of maintaining their position of influence. Further, the harmony of interest between the Center and the Periphery subsequently leads to an alliance formation. This alliance is a mutually beneficial relation between the centers in the two nations, and is what Galtung terms a ‘bridgehead’. Moreover, this bridgehead illustrates where the interaction takes place between the two centers; “the center in the Periphery only serves as a transmission belt (e.g. as commercial firms, trading companies) for value (e.g. raw materials) forwarded to the Center nation. This value enters the Center in the center, with some of it drizzling down to the periphery in the Center” (1971:84). Hence, the interaction originates between the two centers, with the Center on top in a vertical interaction, and subsequent conformity from the Periphery. This interaction makes room for a larger sphere of influence and thus dominance. What is essential about this structural theory of imperialism is that when there is no bridgehead between the center in the Center and the center in the Periphery, there can be no imperialism. Thus, keeping this bridgehead alive becomes important to both the centers to uphold their advantageous position, and for the Center to uphold their influence and dominance over the Periphery.

Furthermore, neo-imperialism is defined by Galtung (1971:95) as control, but is not of the direct, concrete type found in the past. It does not necessarily mean physical presence either, though merely a link that takes the shape of international organizations. These international organizations have certain permanence, often with physical headquarters and a lasting general secretary in the Center. Within the international organizations there is a ‘membership’ where the two centers find each other and there is a harmony of interest within this realm. However; there is a disharmony of interest within the two nations; between the center and the periphery, and thus there is disharmony of interest between the two nations (1971:95). Consequently, the result is a more asymmetrical relationship overall.

3.4 Identifying a Framework for the Ivorian Crisis

Much of what is written on imperialism today revolves around the more open case of American neo-imperialism. As a self-proclaimed global police unit, the United States of America has reinforced the debate on what constitutes neo-imperialism and what are its characteristics. While the US-led policy on global policing is more open and straight forward, there are incidents, like perhaps the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, where neo-imperialism may be acted out with subtle discretion and soft-power. Moreover, what has become evident from the theoretical discussion in the chapter above is that choosing the framework of neo-imperialism over neo-colonialism may not be as evident and clear cut as initially thought. Consequently, there is a need for a more in-depth explanation of this choice and why it appears more suitable as a theoretical framework than neo-colonialism, when looking at the case of Côte d'Ivoire.

Colonialism and imperialism are often treated as synonyms of each other; hence there has been little consistency on what defines and separates the two. As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, this study operates with the notion that colonialism signals direct control over a country. It is also more visible than imperialism due to the transfer of people to exercise direct control, along with what can be considered a significant settlement of foreign nationals. Imperialism, on the other hand, is when indirect control is achieved, mostly without significant settlement (Stanford Encyclopaedia 2006). For this study, I argue that neo-imperialism is a more proper framework based on several arguments. Firstly, colonialism has been defined above as direct control over a state and significant settlement, which is not the case in Côte d'Ivoire. Secondly, as argued by Offiong (1982:65), with the official abolishment of colonialism France selected what they called *interlocuteurs valuable* in order to secure their political influence and to continue to exercise control. In Côte d'Ivoire, Félix Houphouët-Boigny was this negotiator worth talking to. After his passing in 1993, however, France lost their internal advocate and "control", a notion that was strengthened even further when Laurent Gbagbo took office. Thirdly, France has a

military presence in the region due to a previous large-scale strategy put in place to maintain control over the former French empire, known as Francophone Africa. Traditionally, and before Lenin's theory of economic imperialism, the idea of imperialism was closely connected to the concept of an empire (Stanford Encyclopaedia 2006). What constituted an empire was the extensiveness of the territory you ruled over, which often meant the subjugation of many states within this territory in the quest to create the empire itself. Further, as we can see from the previous chapter on the *Françafrique* network, Côte d'Ivoire is part of a larger network and not the only country in which the French have strategic interests. Hence, preserving key contacts and influence in Francophone-Africa has been important components in France's Africa-policy. And lastly, by choosing neo-imperialism, we are talking about a new form of indirect presence and domination in areas of strategic importance that is more discrete, and thus more difficult to pinpoint, than traditional colonialism. Galtung (1971) calls this a relation of dominance, in which one party is evidently stronger than the other. When considering how the international system has been built on the principle of sovereignty, accompanied by consideration of the French history and continued influence on the continent, I find it suitable to apply the theory of neo-imperialism for this study.

The structural theory of imperialism is a very comprehensive and complex theory. Within the outlined capacity of this study it is not possible to include this entire theoretical contribution. I have thus selected parts of Galtung's theoretical framework that I believe help establish a better understanding of the French presence in the Ivorian conflict. I have chosen to work with and focus more closely on selected types of imperialism identified by Galtung; namely military and communication. These were selected based on the information gathered in the field, where it became clear that it was within these two areas that the Ivorian population felt that France was walking a fine line; in essence what was viewed as acceptable and not. Further, I have chosen to use the work of Galtung because he assumes that there are other areas, besides the political and economic arena, where imperialism may be acted out. This seems to be much in line with the information that was gathered for this study.

According to Galtung (1971:91), “the more perfectly the mechanisms of imperialism (...) are put to work, the less overt machinery of oppression is needed”. Therefore, you could claim that when the mechanisms of imperialism start to deteriorate, increased and more direct oppression from the Center is a likely outcome. This statement engages questions whether or not there were signs of a disruption in the harmony of interest between Cote d’Ivoire and France before the conflict broke out in 2002. And based on the answer(s) provided, how should we interpret the French presence during the crisis? Is the French presence in the Ivorian conflict an indication of a states response to a collapsing relationship, and can these actions consequently be interpreted as measures for protecting the structure of power?

4 Empirical Signs of Neo-Imperialism?

This following chapter presents an analysis of two specific cases related to the Côte d'Ivoire crisis in the period from 2002-2007. These two cases represent two of the five types of imperialism identified by Galtung (1971); communication imperialism and military imperialism. They have been selected on the basis of the information gathered for this study, however more importantly because they stand as clear indicators of French neo-imperialism to the Ivorian population. These have been, and still are, some of the most debated events within the conflict and the Ivorian society. The following discussion and subsequent analysis is organized around the theoretical framework of neo-imperialism, with a specific emphasis on the structures of imperialism, as introduced by Galtung in his article *The Structural Theory of Imperialism* (1971).

4.1 Communication: Information Warfare

Johan Galtung describes communication imperialism as a “feudal interaction structure”; the instrument that maintains the inequality between the two actors by protecting the structure and ensuring its longevity (1971:92). If utilized properly, communication imperialism can be a very powerful instrument. By controlling the media one is in fact in control over a country’s “social knowledge”, as well as the source of reference for international press. Hence, this mechanism is of great strategic significance, either for protection or manipulation purposes, to national and global security, and in many cases also warfare (GISP 2008). Therefore, the realm of communication becomes an important fixture used in order to achieve strategic objectives. To manage information to one's advantage may play a critical role in an asymmetrical conflict or setting.

4.1.1 The Media Coverage of the Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire

In an interview with Léon Konan Koffi, the Deputy Director of the Department of Bilateral Relations of the Ivorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he acknowledged that there was already an atmosphere of uneasiness between France and Côte d'Ivoire before the outbreak of the crisis in September 2002. The change was a result of politics pushed forward by President Laurent Gbagbo, or to put it more accurately; a change in the politics that for decades had benefited France and French interests in Côte d'Ivoire. According to Konan Koffi, it was the intention of the Ivorian government to reconsider the agreements of cooperation signed in 1961, and among other things, to further diversify the state's commercial partners. But he emphasized that these were not key elements that brought the relationship to its current state. In his opinion, it was the actions of the *Licorne* force that were cause for the biggest change in the relationship between the two countries (Konan Koffi 2007). From the information provided by Konan Koffi, it could be argued that there were already signs of disruption in the harmony of interest between France and Côte d'Ivoire before the crisis broke out in 2002. Before being elected President, Laurent Gbagbo had a history of aversion towards what he regarded as neo-imperialistic politics and subsequent behaviour of France in Côte d'Ivoire. The platform on which he was elected was strongly influenced by this ideology, which consequently stood as a sharp contrast to the past relationship between the two countries. Under the reign of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, there was a long period of harmony of interest between France and Côte d'Ivoire, or which Galtung terms between the center of the Center and the center of the Periphery. It was a beneficial relationship for the two centers. Thus, when the crisis erupted in September 2002 and the rebel opposition entered the political scene, it may appear as though France took measures to protect their power structure already in place; their power of information. An opportunity may have risen when the uprising appeared and further threatened to overthrow the one person that had started to shake the stability of the imperial structure. And elements of this opposition brought to the table arguments that questioned the legitimacy of the sitting President. In addition, as have been argued by many Ivoirians, there appeared to be a

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connection between one fraction of the rebel forces and the ousted Presidential opponent, Alassane Ouattara. This link could potentially be proven beneficial for France if it was true, seeing that there was already a close connection between the Elysée and Ouattara (Lombardo 2007). Because of the threat to the bridgehead relation between the two centers, and the opportunity to utilize a rebel uprising to their advantage, it will be argued below that France initiated a massive operation to stabilize and uphold their structure of power in Côte d'Ivoire.

The West Africa correspondent for Le Monde, Théophile Kouamouo, described his experience of covering the beginning of the crisis as follows;

“In the evening of September 19....I was called from Paris by a colleague, that there were shots being heard in Abidjan. I hadn't heard anything. I was called at 5 am.....Since day one of the crisis my partnership with Le Monde became very complicated, because Le Monde was at war against President Gbagbo and the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire. For instance, someone tells me General Guei has been assassinated at his residence by the military. You have to look closer at this, dig and find something out he said. I called the people from Guei's own party, UDPCI, and I can't get the information on it. I went to his residency, and the war is already on. Obviously he has not been shot at his own residency. So I write this, and it doesn't get published.... it was not the truth that interested them. They were not interested with this truth. There is something that not many people outside Côte d'Ivoire know, and that is that when the crisis started, the government was supported by the majority of the population. A large part of the population. I have pictures of demonstrations that prove this. But when I tried to write this in my newspaper, they didn't want to know of this support. The departments of photography of Le Monde is independent from the paper itself, and while the pictures I had showed people demonstrating in support of the government, but it said something else in the printed paper. You can see this for yourself in what has been published. I wrote a paper, simple and not a big thing about what happened that day. That day I logged on to look at my story in the paper, and it wasn't there. There was a paper there and it had my name. (The by line was mine, though I didn't write the paper). The person, who had written it, was not me. I asked them what the problem was and they answered that they did no longer wish to explain anything else for me. Not only was the paper something I didn't write, but the views were not mine. It was saying that the rebels were very (shrewd) fast and efficient, and that the government was very aggressive and not very efficient. I was not very pleased with this or comfortable, because I didn't consider

myself writing for a French newspaper, making the promotion of the rebellion. Rebellion is something from the middle ages. It shouldn't exist. So I resigned.” (Kouamouo 2007)¹¹

The story of Théophile Kouamouo may function as an illustration of the powerful interests at play during the Ivorian crisis. Galtung maintained and argued that it is common knowledge that the most important news agencies “are in the hands of the Center countries, relying on Center-dominated, feudal networks of communication” (1971:93). Moreover, he argued that “just as the Periphery produces raw materials that the Center turns into processed goods, the Periphery also produces events that the Center turns into news. This is done by training journalists to see events with Center eyes and by setting up a chain of communication that filters and processes events so that they fit the general pattern”. Even though Kouamouo’s story does not directly fit Galtung’s definition, *Le Monde*’s response and editorial changes indicate some form of filtering process, much like “training journalists”, in order to make the events “fit” Center interests. Herbert Schiller depicted the significance of the above mentioned connection between the center in the Center and news agencies in an excellent way when he stated that any “serious effort to change the social order collides head-on with the fundamental interests of the corporate industrial system” and that “system has at its disposal the information apparatus and the cultural institutions that influence, if not determine, social thinking”. Schiller further claims that the power of information is one of the primary tools of governance, and goes on to explain that “how [this power is] deployed is no less decisive for social control than are the army and the police” (Smandych 2005:5-6). Alain Toussaint, the former spokesperson and communications advisor of President Gbagbo enlightened the author on the importance of a French media campaign for an Ivorian politician and explained that this was important for many reasons: “We are an underdeveloped country. We sleep under the gaze of the international community. Although the population does vote, [France] make the final choice about these kinds of states;

¹¹ Kouamouo 2007 referred to Kouamouo and Tuquoi 2002

underdeveloped states are allowed to survive thanks to the international community” (Toussaint 2007). He illustrated this point by referring to the extensive media campaign headed by Alassane Ouattara in the French press when General Gueï was in power, under which he rallied for foreign (French) support of his campaign in a political environment that he defined as difficult. The former official spokesperson and communication advisor for the Licorne forces in Côte d’Ivoire, Georges Peillon (Peillon 2007), alleged that he was prior to his arrival in Côte d’Ivoire not aware of the strong presence of the French media in Côte d’Ivoire, or in francophone Africa in general. He pointed to what he regarded as evident prejudice in the most renowned French media, like Le Monde, Liberation, and Radio France International (RFI). In general terms, the French press was proclaiming that the power of President Gbagbo was not legitimate, arguing that he had not been democratically elected, and that the only power to recognize was the *Forces Nouvelles*. The former Licorne spokesperson refers to a telephone conversation he had with the chief editor of RFI, shortly after his arrival to Côte d’Ivoire, where he told the chief editor that what the radio was conveying was in fact not consistent with the events on the ground. Peillon claimed that Paris could not be reporting that “Abidjan is on fire and dripping in blood” no such events were actually happening. The reply from RFI had been very clear, and evidently surprised Peillon; “Well, that is just the editorial policy”. This is arguably a reference to the close relationship between the Center and the news agencies in France, which in turn is what is defined as one part of communication imperialism. Peillon, in his interview, emphasize that “we are aware of the collaboration and close relationship between RFI and Quai d’Orsay¹²; RFI is the voice of Africa. So what has been stated by RFI may not necessarily be correct. And when you listen to RFI in Abidjan you find yourself wondering whether they are reporting about the same country you are in” (Peillon 2007). He also refers to a discussion with the late RFI

¹² RFI operates with financial support from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

reporter Jean Hélène¹³, where he had expressed frustration over the impregnable resonation of the French media and their lack of insight to what impact this could have on the image and position of France in Africa. Jean Hélène had further stated that those who would experience the direct consequences of this would not be the French government or the French population in general, but rather the French residents of Côte d'Ivoire. He would unfortunately be proven right about this point, as he sadly, though ironically, would later become a victim of the strong anti-French sentiments in Côte d'Ivoire following the crisis.

It can be argued that it is commonly known that media conglomerates often tend to be partisans of a particular political party. Yet it is expected, on the basis of ethical journalism, that what they do report, other than opinion pieces, are valid facts. The French newspapers are in principle politically independent, but the coverage of the Ivorian crisis, among others, does provide grounds to question this independency. Andrew Wallis (2006) writes that the French press coverage on the Rwandan genocide in 1994 appeared very much influenced by what he calls “good news” stories. Wallis further claims that these stories were fed to the journalists by the French government. In Côte d'Ivoire, on the contrary, the French coverage of the crisis was of the negative sort. The coverage appeared to unevenly portray the parties of the conflict, playing on simple characteristics and reinforcing existing stereotypes. When analysing a few newspaper articles from the beginning of the crisis, it is striking how the layout, along with the carefully selected material, stand out as either ignorant or just clever manipulation of information. Recalling Galtung's theory presented in chapter 3.4, imperialism can not exist without a bridgehead between the center in the Center and the center in the Periphery. Thus, protecting this bridgehead would appear to be of primary importance to the center in the Center. How can this then, be related in any way to the ignorant or manipulative media coverage of the

¹³ Jean Hélène, or Christian Baldensberger by his Christian name, was a well known French journalist working for RFI in Côte d'Ivoire before he was shot and killed by an Ivorian policeman in 2003.

Ivorian crisis? There appeared to be, again in light of Galtung's theory, a valid threat to this structure of dominance between France and Côte d'Ivoire represented by the figure of President Gbagbo. He threatened 'the social order', as Schiller put it, and thus the structure that ensures a beneficial position for France. And this structure is subsequently rooted in, and relying on, the bridgehead between the centers in France and Côte d'Ivoire. Based on these arguments, it could be maintained that the news agencies may have reacted the way they did to secure an 'unstable' situation, and, moreover, attempted to gain control over the bridgehead relation.

In his analysis of international news reports on Africa, Thomas Bassett (2003:13) refers to what can be understood as a mainstream focus on crisis, chaos, and disorder. Furthermore, this is communicated to the general international public in what he calls "a highly stylized fashion". The news reports covering the beginning of the Ivorian crisis skilfully created a media-image of a dichotomous conflict; between the aggressive rulers of the south against an underprivileged and purposely deprived north (Bassett 2003, Coulibaly 2002). The *Forces Nouvelles* army is described as well organized and unified, where as the government troops are characterized as poorly motivated, internally split, unreliable, and that many desert, just to name a few (Coulibaly 2002). Another dichotomy that the press appeared to take a likening to was that President Gbagbo was in fact President against the Ivorian population's will, and that the rebel leaders were better representatives of the people, seeing that the uprising was a collective call for justice. The French media indicated that the President did not have much support among the population, that the election was not supported by the society, and that the state was regarded as "a menace and a threat, which society will stand up and fight against as soon as the opportunity arrives" (Coulibaly 2002). The general press coverage continuously reiterated that President Gbagbo was not democratically elected, and thus questioned the legitimacy of his powers (Ahua 2004, Coulibaly 2002, and Kouamouo & Tuquoi 2002). By delegitimizing President Gbagbo, the media may have made an attempt at securing the bridgehead by encouraging the removal of President Gbagbo through democratic measures, as opposed to other more violent measures to secure the same outcome. By doing so, and

finding a replacement for Gbagbo, they could potentially reinvigorate the bridgehead relation, and thus French dominance. Interestingly enough, the coverage indicated that there had never been a democratically elected President in Côte d'Ivoire and further argues that the people had consequently suffered from it. Though the legitimacy of the Ivorian Presidential election is regarded as outside the scope of this study, I will argue that either way the legitimacy of a sitting African president has never appeared to be an issue for France in the past, nor does it seem to have been much of an issue when dealing with the Ivorian government right up until the crisis broke out in September 2002. In an interview in 2003, the Ivorian Ambassador in Washington D.C., Pascal D. Kokora, criticized the international press coverage of Côte d'Ivoire claiming that it was unfair and biased; "In the French media, everything the rebels do is good, and everything the government does is bad. How can the Western world help our nation's democracy if they encourage people to take power by military force, unless there are other motives they don't want to tell us about" (Luxner 2003).

To a great extent, the media coverage of the crisis emerged as a personalization of the conflict. President Laurent Gbagbo became in many ways the centre focus for where to blame the downfall of Côte d'Ivoire. The media reports appear to lack the will to look into the complex and interactive social, political and economic dimensions of the crisis. The news reports presented an uncritical picture of how Alassane Ouattara and his political party, *Le Rassemblement Démocratique Républicain* (RDR), had become victims of a continuous mission by the 'dominant ethnic group' in order to remain in the position of power. The press did not appear to take into consideration the political game that took place in Côte d'Ivoire following the passing of President Fèlix Houphouët-Boigny, when the three main political parties (FPI, PDCI, RDR) failed to create national constituencies and instead adopted what became a mainstream strategy; playing on ethno-regional and religious-based sentiments. Moreover, by declaring that the uprising originated from a desire to put an end to what the population regarded as the political hegemony of the north (Coulibaly 2002), the reports indicated a continuation of suppressing politics from Houphouët-Boigny's reign to President Gbagbo. Hence, the actual political difference

between President Gbagbo and his predecessors becomes lost in the news reports. In addition, this personalization of the conflict challenged the French media, who, according to Liliana Lombardo (2007), had difficulties finding substantial arguments why President Gbagbo himself was such a terrible leader; he had no history that could contribute to tainting his image. Consequently, the media began to focus on the First Lady, Mdm. Simone Gbagbo, and printed stories of her past as a jailed young activist, in order to tarnish the reputation of the Ivorian President. It should be noted that the role of Mdm. Gbagbo in the Ivorian crisis has been regarded as quite significant in the eyes of many international observers; not so much due to her past, but because of her close connection to the movement known as the Young Patriots. The youth movement is pro-President Gbagbo and the ruling party, *Le Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI), and has been involved in many of the violent, anti-French demonstrations in Côte d'Ivoire. This claim of personalization in the media coverage has recently been backed by a French politician, Jack Lang, who made a public statement in April of 2008 'admitting' to the unfair and far from "correct" media coverage of the Ivorian crisis. According to Jack Lang, President Gbagbo of Côte d'Ivoire has been unrightfully slandered in European and American media. Lang further claims that the French government made President Gbagbo a 'scapegoat' during the crisis, that they have provided wrongful information to the press, and that the President, along with his government, has been "demonized" in the media (Martin 2008).

Though the French news reports on the Ivorian crisis appear to have shown more prejudice than what may be considered ethically right, it is necessary to mention that press freedom in Côte d'Ivoire has been under attack by both the Ivorian government and the *Forces Nouvelles*. This has been repeatedly reported on by various press organizations, and there have been several incidents of violent offences towards members of national, international and freelance media. One of the most notable incidents was the interruption of a Radio Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI) interview with the Prime Minister Chales Konnay Banny, in November 2006, when members of the national security force prevented the Prime Minister from making the radio announcement. The RTI Director-General, along with the management board,

was dismissed by presidential decree the same day (Amnesty International 2007, Reporters without Borders 2004).

In light of Galtung's structural theory of imperialism, the above-mentioned events in Côte d'Ivoire might be interpreted as a form of communication imperialism, acted out in an attempt to secure the stability of an unsteady alliance between two centers. Moreover, judging from the events that will be presented in the following section, this attempt was not successful in doing so. Thus, as indicated in the following text, the military superiority and dominance of France entered the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire in what might appear as a last attempt to salvage the remainder of the French dominance.

4.2 French Military Presence and Intervention

The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire signed in 1961 an agreement of cooperation and defence with its former colonizer France. The defence component of this agreement was aimed at maintaining the security and stability in Côte d'Ivoire (Ayissi1999). The agreement provided the Ivorian government with the opportunity to ask France for military assistance in a case of external or internal threats and attacks. However, what actually constitutes an external or internal threat or attack was rather unclear, and moreover, the decision to intervene was solely in the hands of France (Laursen 1984:26-28). Further, these interventions were supposed to be ad-hoc, with aim to counteract potential or existing aggression, and always be as a response to a request from the local authorities (Dokken 2000:238). According to Ayissi (1999:22), the basic rationale for this legal tool was twofold; 1) they constituted a roadmap for France's military interventions in Africa, and 2) they guaranteed both the legality and the legitimacy of such interventions.

However, there were evident changes in the French doctrine in Sub-Saharan Africa during the Presidency of Jacques Chirac. These changes most likely resulted from the revised Africa-strategy advocated by President Mitterrand in the beginning

of the 1990's, followed by the outcome of the French political and military role in the Rwanda conflict and genocide in 1994 (Weiss 2004). The reformation of French interventions in conflicts on the African continent was perhaps the most obvious attempt at redefining the French military presence in Africa. France would no longer respond to African internal conflicts with military aid, most likely to avoid international criticism and reprimands. Consequently, the doctrine of intervention that was based on the agreements of cooperation seemed to have changed to non-interference in African internal affairs (Weiss 2004). The general terms of the cooperation agreements are available for the public to read, however the specifics of the agreements are found in the classified *accords spéciaux*. Thus, it is not possible to know what exact changes have been made within the separate agreements, though it is believed that many of the secret clauses regarding military assistance have been declared worthless and invalid (Balint-Kurti 2007:21, Benson 1997). When the cities of Abidjan, Bouaké, and Korhogo were attacked by some 800 rebellious, exiled military personnel on September 19, 2002, the Ivorian National Army quickly secured control over the country's commercial capital, Abidjan. The rebel forces, on the other hand, were strong and seized control over the second largest city in Côte d'Ivoire (Bouaké), as well as gained control over half the country (North), splitting it geographically into two parts (UN Security Council 2003a). There were several attempts made by the loyalist army to regain control over the territory captured by the rebel opposition, but no advances were made in the re-acquisition of the north. The rebel forces had strengthened their hold by merging together the different opposition groups as one cohesive faction, calling itself *le Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI), later collectively known as the *Forces Nouvelles* (UN Security Council 2003a).

The Ivorian government asked France and other West African states for help, declaring the centre and northern part of Côte d'Ivoire a war zone. The government defined the rebel opposition as terrorists, arguing that they were funded and supported by the neighbouring states Burkina Faso and Liberia. The Ivorian Defence Minister, Lida Kouassi, stated in an interview with *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) on

September 20, 2002, that the Ivorian government had conveyed to France “the information we had about the situation and expressed the hope that they will look into the possibility of helping us, should the crisis last and should it be proven that foreign elements are involved”. Moreover, a response from the French government came a few days later in an interview with French Minister of Defence, Michèle Alliot-Marie, where she stated that “if states are attacked by other states, France can be called on to support the legitimate government’s defence action” (Balint-Kurti 2007:21). France responded to the call for assistance by offering low-level assistance, such as help with transport, communication assistance and food. The revised bilateral agreement now required that the state was under foreign attack or that the attack is supported from the outside. Arguing that there was not sufficient evidence of an attack by foreign forces, France refused to intervene militarily (Peace Corps 2002). France did, however, mobilize a small unit of military personnel to protect and possibly evacuate French residents in Côte d’Ivoire.

On the 17th of October, 2002, a ceasefire was brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and further signed by the MPCJ and the Ivorian government. ECOWAS got involved as the crisis had occurred in the “economic heart of the region” (Nowrojee 2004). The agreement between the Ivorian government and the *Forces Nouvelles* acknowledged an ECOWAS peace-monitoring mission, but as a result of financial constraints this mission was stalled. While waiting for the deployment of a buffer force from ECOWAS, France was asked by ECOWAS and the Ivorian government to assist until these forces arrived (UN Security Council 2003a). Their mandate was thus extended from protecting French nationals and providing low-level assistance, to ceasefire monitoring (IRIN November 2002, Nowrojee 2004, US State department 2006), a mission termed *Opération Licorne*. This interposition of the former colonizer, between the government and rebel forces, was subsequently the source of much anger and frustration within the Ivorian government, as France, in their opinion, did not fully honour their bilateral agreement of defence. The Ivorian government was still maintaining the position that the *Forces*

Nouvelles were supported by the neighbouring country Burkina Faso, and that support constituted a foreign attack as the revised bilateral agreement demanded.

In May 2003, following the Linas-Marcoussis peace accord, a mandate for a UN mission to Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI) was granted, and the small mission joined the ECOWAS troops in the ceasefire monitoring of the Zone of Confidence. ECOWAS had then been present in the crisis with 1,500 peacekeepers, along with the 4,000 strong French Licorne force, since January 2003. The mission's mandate was to implement the agreements following the LMA (U.S. Department of State 2008). This mission was later replaced by the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). UNOCI thus assumed the role previously held by a combination of UN and ECOWAS troops, and continued to operate in conjunction with the Licorne force (UN Security Council 2003b, Williams 2005). Their mandate included "observing and monitoring the implementation of the comprehensive ceasefire agreement of 3 May 2003 and movements of armed groups; assistance in disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, repatriation and resettlement; protection of United Nations personnel, institutions and civilians; support for humanitarian assistance, implementation of the peace process; and assistance in the field of human rights, public information and law and order" (Relief Web 2004). Moreover, the UNOCI along with the French forces, were authorized by the Security Council (UN Security Council 2004a) "to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate, within its capabilities and its areas of deployment".

4.2.1 The Escalation of the November Crisis

The initial incident in November 2004 that started off a chain of events which eventually escalated into an International Justice Court-case began with the Ivorian government's decision to break an 18-month long ceasefire with the *Forces Nouvelles*. On November 4th, 2004, the Ivorian National Army (FANCI) launched an air strike targeting *Forces Nouvelles* positions in the cities of Bouaké and Korhogo north of the Zone of Confidence, resulting in several civilian casualties and a cut off

of water and electricity in several cities. The following day, on November 5th, new attacks on *Forces Nouvelles* positions were undertaken by the Government's air force resulting in even more casualties, both civilians and *Forces Nouvelles* soldiers. The UNOCI also received reports on the physical movement of FANCI troops towards the Zone of Confidence and the *Forces Nouvelles* headquarters in Bouaké (UN Security Council 2004b). The air strikes continued on November 6th with, according to President Gbagbo's information to the UN Secretary-General, aim to be "limited and targeted at the recapture of specific towns". In a UN report by the Secretary-General, it was stated that President Gbagbo also requested a UNOCI operation to ensure the security of these cities following the Government's air attacks. At exactly 13.30 hours, local time, the Licorne headquarters in the city of Bouaké was struck by the bombing from the FANCI air force, that consequently resulted in the death of nine French soldiers, one American citizen, and 38 wounded French soldiers. Within a few hours the same day, the French air force retaliated the attack by destroying the majority of the FANCI air fleet (CNN 2004). The attack was ordered by President Jacques Chirac, who had ordered the "destruction of Ivorian military aviation equipment used in violation of the ceasefire" (Présidence de la Republique 2004). The Ivorian government officially stated that the Ivorian attack on the French force had been an unfortunate mistake, while the French government, on the other hand, called the attack a pre-emptive strike. The French Minister of Defence Michele Alliot-Marie further announced that the Licorne retaliation was in accordance with what could be considered legitimate self-defence, and that it was a necessary action (UN Security Council 2004b).

In the days following the November 6th attacks, there were a lot of unrest and several anti-French protests in and around Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. The public disorder took a turn for the worse when, on November 9th, the Young Patriots¹⁴ clashed

¹⁴ The movement known as the Young Patriots (Jeunes Patriotes) is a young and militant movement supporting President Laurent Gbagbo. It is headed by Charles Blé Goudé, however, many argue that the movement receives its orders from the president, who in turn relies on the support from the movement.

together with a Licorne squadron at Hotel Ivoire in Abidjan. The hotel was guarded by Licorne because of its function as a safe-haven for French nationals and other foreigners who feared for their security after the increasing rioting and hostilities following the November 6th bombings. The Licorne operation received personnel support from the Ivorian National Army, in their endeavour to move people who had sought refuge at the hotel as the crowds gathered outside grew increasingly larger, shouting anti-French slogans. At one point the French soldiers opened fire on the crowd, killing 11 people, one of which was a pregnant woman (CNN 2004, Koinange 2004). This caused the majority of the crowd to disperse, but it did not calm down anti-French sentiments. Answering to the claims of hateful violations of their mandate, the French replied that it had been their Ivorian counterparts who had fired the deadly shots outside the hotel as they were trying to help the Licorne squadron to leave (Meldrum 2004). This claim, however, was quickly denounced by Colonel Georges Guiai Bi Poin of the Ivorian gendarmes, who not only claimed that there were no shots fired by the Young Patriots but that there had been no warning shots fired by the Licorne before the deadly shots were fired (Rosenthal 2004).

Within the two weeks following the November 6th and 9th incidents, an approximately 9,000 expatriates left Côte d'Ivoire, where about 2,000 of these needed assistance or protection from the UNOCI. Of the 15,000 French citizens, many with a dual citizenship, and living in Côte d'Ivoire before the attacks in November 2004, only about 4000 remained at the end of the conflict in 2007 (UN Security Council 2004b, Meldrum 2004).

4.2.2 Direct Violence; a Last Resort?

The basic idea of Johan Galtung's (1971) theory of imperialism is the occurrence of a harmony of interest between the center of the Center nation and the center of the Periphery nation, based on the bridgehead-relation described in section 3.4. As explained, a bridgehead-relation is needed in order for an exchange between two nations to be viewed as imperialism, as opposed to theft or looting. Harmony of

interest occurs when the two parties are linked together in an exchange that is mutually beneficial for the two. There does not necessarily have to be an equal outcome for the two, though an exchange where both the parties are satisfied with their outcome is required. Military imperialism, according to Galtung, is in the neo-imperialistic phase seen as control through “international organizations”. The international organizations that Galtung identifies are military alliances, treaties, and organizations (1971:95). The control is exercised through less physical presence than during colonialism; there may be a form of physical headquarter present in the Periphery country, but the general secretary is generally located in the Center. Thus, in light of the above characterization, it can be argued that the defence accord signed between France and Côte d’Ivoire in 1961 can be classified as military neo-imperialism. The agreement of bilateral assistance was mutually beneficial as it offered Côte d’Ivoire military protection and the means of destruction, where as France gained the main access to key natural resources within Côte d’Ivoire. This agreement was signed under the reign of Fèlix Houphouët-Boigny and was followed by 30 years of stable relations between the two nations. There were no multiparty system allowed under his rule, and thus no threat to this imperial structure. However, when the sole ruler passed away in 1993 it threw the political landscape in Côte d’Ivoire into a new era. His potential successors presented new political platforms that could potentially lead Côte d’Ivoire into a phase of major political and policy turmoil.

There are two events that occurred between the signing of the defence accord in 1961 and the eruption of the Ivorian crisis in 2002 that I argue contributed to a destabilization of the bridgehead between France and Côte d’Ivoire. Firstly, the change in the French Africa-policy following President Mitterrand’s speech at the Franco-African summit at La Baule in 1990, allegedly motivated the modification of the bilateral defence accords (Weiss 2004). This modification resulted in a less-than favourable agreement on the part of Côte d’Ivoire, and thus an increase in the asymmetry between the two centers. Arguably, the harmony of interest between them may have decreased as a result of this change, although it did ultimately not change

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the partnership between the two. The other event worth mentioning was the 2000 election that led to the inauguration of President Laurent Gbagbo. With President Gbagbo in power a reformation of policies followed that had been untouched for decades, and this restructuring was in clear violation to the imperialistic system that had been in place since independence (Interview with Anonymous #1 2007, Toussaint 2007). I would argue that this led to a new and even stronger shift in the harmony of interest, and this time threatening the bridgehead between the two centers in a more severe manner than before.

There is room for military imperialism between two nations when there is great inequality between the two. When only one state has the social structure that is compatible with a modern army, along with the industrial capacity to produce technological hardware, it can easily create a situation of dependency for a less developed state. The dependency would occur as the lesser developed state would be in need of either protection or to purchase means of destruction; and often times both (Galtung 1971:92). The Center is now in a position of obedience by the Periphery, and has thus the power to influence the decision making process of the Periphery nation. When the crisis broke out in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 and the Ivorian national army had difficulties defeating the uprising right away, the head of state turned to the second element of their national defence; the defence accord and French military support. However, this time France did not come to the immediate rescue of their former colony, but opted instead for low level, technical assistance. As a result of how the events unfolded, France ended up in a military interposition between the Ivorian government and the *Forces Nouvelles*. Kwame Nkrumah (1971:ix-xvi) maintains that the last stage of neo-imperialism is military aid. From this point on, meaning when the Center nation physically enters the Periphery nation, the system of neo-imperialism will gradually become visible. As a result, the structure of imperialism will most likely not be tenable with the international system as witnesses.

Kirk and Greene (1995:80) point to a significant characteristic of the temporary nature of military interventions; interventions will occur as a response to periods of a political stalemate or economic mismanagement, where total instability is the trigger. However, there is always a promise to return political power back to those who rightfully hold it when peace and calm has settled. Interestingly enough, if we reflect back on the previous analysis of the media coverage of the Ivorian crisis, there appeared to be a cohesive agreement among the French press that President Gbagbo was not democratically elected and that there seemed to be more support among the population towards the *Forces Nouvelles*, than the sitting government. Moreover, with the lack of French intervention at an earlier stage in the conflict and the developments following the Linas-Marcoussis Accord¹⁵, there appeared to be no return of power to the Government and restore the situation as before the outbreak of the crisis.

On November 4th, 2004, when the Ivorian government launched the first attack on rebel positions in the north of Côte d'Ivoire, they acted in a clear violation of the ceasefire agreement that they had ratified in May 2003. According to Léon Konan Koffi, the Ivorian Deputy Director at the Office for Bilateral-relations, phone contact was established between President Gbagbo and President Chirac, where the former informed the latter about "Opération Dignété"¹⁶ and upcoming attacks on the rebel-held north (Konan Koffi 2007, Reporters without Borders 2004). Further, in the 2004 UN Security Council report on the UNOCI progress in Côte d'Ivoire, it was clearly stated that the UN Secretary-General was informed by President Gbagbo of the Ivorian military strategy and the exact aim of the operation on November 6th, 2004. This information was provided two days after the initial attack on *Forces Nouvelles* positions north of the Zone of Confidence. The attacks were carried out by the Ivorian

¹⁵ The government is today a political collaboration between President Gbagbo's party, *Front Populaire Ivoirien*, and the *Forces Nouvelles*. The Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire is now the leader of the *Forces Nouvelles*, Guillaume Soro

¹⁶ The operation to unite the country was nicknamed "Opération Dignété". The bombings by the Ivorian air force on November 4th, 2004, signalled the start of this operation.

air force stationed at Yamoussoukro airport, and hit cities north of the Zone of Confidence. What is striking about these events is the fact that no attempts at stopping or condemning the strikes were made on the part of UNOCI and France, even though they were present at both ends of the attacks and knew perfectly well what was going on. This could indicate that the level of communication between the center of France and center of Côte d'Ivoire was still at harmony of interest, and that there perhaps was still room for negotiations. By allowing the Ivorian government room for manoeuvring, France may have 'played the game' to win back their obedience. This could offer a possible explanation for why the Licorne forces first reacted to the government's offensive when they found themselves being under attack, counting casualties and material losses. The spokesperson for the French Ministry of Defence, Jean-Francois Bureau, stated that France "responded in a situation of legitimate defence" (Associated Press 2004). If that was in fact the case, how does this reply fit with the UN mandate, which guides the French presence and military actions in Côte d'Ivoire? According to the mandate, the French are first and foremost present to protect and secure the population of Côte d'Ivoire. They are, however, also expected to secure the protection of the UNOCI personnel. Thus, how can France justify this statement when they did not take action following the first Ivorian military offense across the Zone of Confidence? How is this statement in accordance with their initial proclamation, where they claim that their interposition in the Ivorian conflict was first and foremost to maintain the ceasefire between the north and the south?

Galtung (1971:101) argues that there are different degrees of imperialism and that "if it is perfect, it is a perfect instrument of structural violence. When it is less than perfect something must be substituted for what is lost in structural violence: direct violence, or at least threat of direct violence. This is where the military type of imperialism becomes so important, since it can be seen as a potential to be activated when the other types of imperialism, particularly the economic and political types, show important cracks in the structure". A French journalist, stationed in Abidjan since before the eruption of the crisis in September, 2002, stated that the Licorne already had the opportunity to physically stop the air-raids by acting on the

information they had available to them by being present at the Yamoussoukro airport (Kouamouo 2007). A high ranking intelligence officer¹⁷ in the Ivorian army reflected upon the same thing, asking “what were they [the French] doing instead of stopping us? France could have said stop, but they didn’t” (Interview with Anonymous #1 2007). Sebastien Dano Djeje, a member of the Cabinet for National Reconciliation, stated on behalf of the Government that the attack on the Licorne position in Bouake was an unfortunate mistake. He further claimed that the attacks were not targeted at the French peacekeeping force (Associated Press 2004, Astier 2004). Jean-Francois Bureau, the spokesman for the French Ministry of Defence, replied that the French forces responded in a situation of legitimate defence, but emphasized that the continuing priority would be the immediate end of combat (Astier 2004). Consequently, the Security Council officially condemned the Ivorian attacks on the French base, and further confirmed that both the UNOCI and the Licorne forces “were authorised to use all necessary means to fully carry out their mandate” (Associated Press 2004, UN Security Council 2008). Hence, it is possible to argue that Licorne did not act outside their mandate, but could rather choose their method of reaction accordingly. In other words, the UN mandate ultimately legitimized the French response. The French Foreign Minister, Michel Barnier, claimed that the French presence in the Ivorian crisis had been about nothing else but ensuring security and to avoid a destabilization of the country. My question is simply what the French authorities thought they would achieve with such a sharp act of retaliation? Did they think that it would go unnoticed by the already agitated population and in due course lead to a more stable situation? The repercussions of the Ivorian attacks, when President Chirac did not hesitate to respond in full force, were swift and brutal, and without consideration for the situation on the ground and how it could be drastically affected. Why did they not take measures to ensure that the situation did not spiral out of control? There were no attempts made by France at making any contact with the Ivorian government in order to clarify the situation before going to such drastic steps

¹⁷ I have chosen to keep the identity of this informant anonymous.

as full-force retaliation. I claim, in light of Galtung's theory, that the French retaliation signals either a strong message to the Ivorian government or a final break with the former alliance. The bridgehead relation that occurs in an imperialistic relation signals conformity and, as pointed out in a previous section of this chapter, there have been events leading up to a weakening of the system of relational patterns. Without this bridgehead between the two centers there would be no structural imperialism, and thus the relations between France and Côte d'Ivoire would merely be a regular exchange. And if this were to occur, France would lose its beneficial position of dominance and indirect control in Côte d'Ivoire. Furthermore, this could result in a domino effect in regards to the position of France in all of Francophone Africa, consequently leading to a decline of access and influence. Thus, according to Bukharin (1972:123-124) it is important to take into account that in 'peaceful' times the military state apparatus is hidden behind the scenes where it never stops functioning; in war times it appears on the scene most directly.

Thus far in the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, the French troops had not only worked to promote peace and stability to the country, but also effectively worked to protect the government troops from rebel attacks. After the French retaliation attacks on the Ivorian air force, the public began to suspect a close cooperation between the rebels and the French. The dominating view was that the conflict was a part of the strategic French cover-up to gain increased control over the country and her resources. This belief was further strengthened by a statement made by President Gbagbo's official spokesman, Desiré Tagro, when he was broadcasted on national television demanding the UN Security Council to take action against France. He stated that "we are faced with aggression by one country against another country," and "are informing the entire world that France has come to attack us" (Knowlton 2004). Consequently, violent demonstrations erupted in the Ivorian capital of Yamoussoukro and the city of Abidjan, involving civilians, as well as the Licorne force and the Ivorian gendarmerie. News reports on the atmosphere in Abidjan following the French airstrike, describe an explosion of animosity within the Ivorian population. They tell of violent youths spreading out in the Abidjan neighbourhoods looking for French residents, swinging

their machetes and sticks while chanting “get the French” (Dufka 2004, Kouassi 2004, and Knowlton 2004). The presence of the French forces at Hotel Ivoire was a result of this increasing animosity and subsequent violence, as the hotel had become a hiding ground for terrified expatriates in need of rescue from the angry mob. According to Corrine Dufka (2004), the Ivorian government should be held responsible for not controlling the masses roaming in the streets of Abidjan. They did play an important role in the deployment of the people, as well as the French hostilities, through their control over the Ivorian media and their messages of hate. “If Gbagbo won’t control the militias, the UN peacekeepers must step in to protect the civilians”, Dufka stated. According to a report from BBC (2004), concern was expressed among the Ivoirians regarding the reason for the presence of Licorne troops at Cocody¹⁸. Many believed that the forces, also counting several army tanks, were on their way to overthrow President Gbagbo by taking over his residency. These beliefs were later denied by the French Foreign Minister, who pledged that there were no hidden motives behind the French mission, and certainly no intention of overthrowing President Gbagbo (Knowlton 2004). However, the French government placed all blame for the shooting at Hotel Ivoire on the Ivorian gendarmerie, claiming that they were to blame for the fatal shots. To a reporter from *Agence France Presse* (AFP), Colonel Georges Guiai Bi Poin of the Ivorian gendarmerie rebutted the French official statements and accusations. He stated the French forces were the ones who fired into the crowd outside Hotel Ivoire on November 9th, killing several people. The Colonel, who was in charge of the unit dispatched to support the French, coordinate the collaboration, and control the crowds gathering outside Hotel Ivoire, alleged that there had been no shots fired from the crowd and that the order to open fire against the protesters had come from the French colonel in Charge, D’Estremon. Guiai Bi Poin was in fact quoted saying that “French troops fired directly into the crowd. They opened fire on the orders of their chief Colonel D’Estremon, [and] without warning

¹⁸ Cocody is a suburb of Abidjan. Due to the many ambassadors, wealthy business people, and the President residing in this area, it is regarded as the most upmarket area of Abidjan.

[shots]”¹⁹ (Rosenthal 2004). On the other hand, an administrative hotel staff-member at Hotel Ivoire²⁰ who was present on November 9th, expressed later in an interview that the French soldiers had most likely fired the shots only to protect themselves. He spoke of an intense situation that had made everyone present very nervous, and that the Licorne force in many ways had appeared trapped (Anonymous #2 2007).

The questions put forth in the analysis above indicate the difficulty of including a former colonizer in a neutral peacekeeping mission. Though, it must be noted that the international interest to aid in creating a peacekeeping force in the first place, was not an easy task. France, a permanent member of the Security Council, has for instance volunteered in several peacekeeping missions on the continent, where others have been reluctant to help. However, according to Waage (2004:3), “states resort to mediations of other people’s conflicts, not only for humanitarian reasons, but also in pursuit of their own foreign policy and domestic interests. Consequently, mediations might improve a mediator’s position by expanding its power and influence.” Andrew Wallis, in his analysis of the French role in the Rwandan genocide, refers to a UN draft regarding the rather unfortunate incident when France operated alongside the UN, instead of being an official part of the UN forces. Thus, would it be any less unfortunate for the French to have a separate command, parallel with the UN, in Côte d’Ivoire? According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2005) the French retaliation on the Ivorian army was a move that ultimately undermined “the impartial stance of the French contingent”. Further, the ICG advises the French to consider a gradual withdrawal from the UN mission in order to strengthen the position of the UNOCI. According to several sources (Lombardo 2007, Toussaint 2007), they have been in possession of an unpublished UN report criticizing the French military actions in Côte d’Ivoire in November 2007. This report is supposedly circling around in certain media-sectors, although attempts at getting a

¹⁹ Bracket added by the author. The Colonel stated in French “acune sommation”, which in French implies “warning shots” but is translated into warning in English.

²⁰ I have chosen to keep the identity of the informant anonymous for this study.

hold of the report for this study have failed. After the events of November 2004, the Ivorian government officially expressed their desire for France to officially withdraw its force from Côte d'Ivoire and that UNOCI would expand its mission to include a new international contributor. "People [felt and still] feel some kind of deception. They expected some other behaviour from France. It has been a shock for the population" (Brossard 2007). To this day, France is still present in Côte d'Ivoire, though with a reduced force, and it remains to be seen whether a complete withdrawal from the country will happen or not.

5 Summarizing Arguments and Conclusion

When reading up on coverage of the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire it may appear on the surface that is rooted in ethno-nationalist and religious differences, yet most studies indicate that the Ivorian conflict is more complex than the image portrayed by the popular media. The nation's social, economic, and political context has over time cultivated an atmosphere in which the political elite turned to rhetoric that stimulated alienation and segregation among the population. In the struggles for power the national troubles escalated into an armed conflict that spilled over the states boundaries.

The purpose of this study has been to look more closely at the involvement of France in this conflict and the research question was: *How are we to understand the strong French presence in Côte d'Ivoire from 2002-2007?*

Johan Galtung's structural theory of imperialism has been employed as a framework to analyze the role of France in the conflict and to further explore whether it can be argued that there is any legitimacy to the allegations of French neo-imperialism. Recalling Galtung's theory, presented in section 3.4, imperialism is defined by an asymmetrical relationship of dominance based on an alliance between the established centers within the Center and Periphery nations. This framework was further applied to the press coverage of the Ivorian conflict and the military events of November 2004. Through data triangulation, this research paper has attempted to broadly secure the validity of its analysis by adding multiple sources of information.

5.1 Harmony of Interest; The Legacy

The historic facts of the close post-colonial relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire indicate that it was a mutually beneficial alliance. This alliance had much of the same characteristics as the bridgehead relationship described by Galtung

in his theory of structural imperialism (1971). The relationship was rooted in, and between, the two nation centers, involving political, economical and cultural elites from both sides that had mutual interests. At the core of this relationship was the official bilateral agreement of cooperation. The agreement secured France access to Côte d'Ivoire's natural resources, in addition to securing the Ivorian government the position of power through promises of French military protection in internal or external conflicts. Regarded as an asymmetrical agreement, it provided France monopolistic power in the Ivorian export market and with authority to decide when to intervene in an Ivorian conflict. Thus, in light of the framework provided by Galtung, this study maintains that the relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire was one of dominance, where France was the dominant nation. This connection signals the important bridgehead between the two centers and can according to Galtung therefore be defined as imperialism (1971:94).

Imperialism may not necessarily take form as a perfect structure, but as long as there is a harmony of interest between the two nations and their centers of power it may be more difficult to discover the delicate form of structural violence.

5.2 Disharmony of Interest: The Threat of Political Reform

After transitioning from authoritarian rule to a multi-party political system a period of political, economic and social instability followed in Côte d'Ivoire. More and more actors were gradually allowed on to the political scene, and some of these individuals straight-forwardly opposed the traditional French-oriented policies. Laurent Gbagbo of the FPI, for instance, wanted a more beneficial outcome for his country than what France could offer through their economic and political relations. Accordingly, when elected President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Gbagbo took office accompanied by visions of reform. Consequently, the likely outcome of these reforms and the new political agenda would be a diminished French dominance in her former colony. In light of these arguments it appears to be a shift in the balance of

power between the two centers, a balance shift that threatened France and French interests.

When the crisis erupted in September 2002 there was still an agreement of cooperation between France and Côte d'Ivoire, which consequently led President Gbagbo to call on French assistance to put an end to the armed opposition. However, France chose not to engage militarily. This decision made the Ivorian government and population question France's motives, within the frame of the agreement of cooperation. Subsequently, alongside the development of the conflict, Ivorian allegations surfaced claiming that the actions taken by France within the territory of their sovereign state were neo-imperialistic. These accusations appeared to be rooted in incidents directly related to the conflict, such as the French press coverage of the crisis and the military actions in November 2004.

Accordingly, when a state of harmony between two nations turns into a state of disharmony, it means by definition a weakening of the relational bridgehead between the two parties. It is this bridgehead that constitutes imperialism, and when it begins to deteriorate, direct violence may become more visible.

5.2.1 Means of Communication

This study argues that the French press coverage of the Ivorian crisis can, in light of the Galtung's neo-imperialistic framework, be understood as an element to secure the asymmetrical relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire in place before the Ivorian election in 2000. The link between the two countries before the crisis appeared much like Galtung describes the communicational relationship between a Center and the Periphery. France had the means of communication (e.g. a large media network and many corporations), on which Côte d'Ivoire relied on for news, as well as sought out when in need of vital press coverage.

Furthermore, the large news agencies gave a severely biased coverage of the Ivorian conflict, in which the French contribution can be considered questionable at

best. By dichotomizing the conflict using simplistic characterizations and reinforced stereotypes, the press appeared to selectively leave out its complex political, economical and social background. Continuously questioning the legitimacy of the President, the press brought these stereotypes to another level by suggesting that Gbagbo was not supported by his country's population. Additionally, and in breach with diplomatic customs, the coverage unevenly portrayed the two opposing sides of the conflict in favour of the *Forces Nouvelles*. The editorial policy of Le Monde and RFI seemingly took the front seat when their coverage hit the press, for the most part missing valid and important facts.

In view of Galtung's framework, the above situation leads us to question whether this can be interpreted as a sign of center interest in the Center taking the measures to secure its stumbling position of dominance over the Periphery. If that is the case, then French media's actions and dominant behaviour would exemplify communication imperialism.

5.2.2 Means of Destruction

As with the media coverage analysed in the previous section, the defence agreement between France and Côte d'Ivoire, a separate element of the agreement of cooperation, also shows sign of neo-imperialism; this time with a military focus. When Côte d'Ivoire called upon France to fulfil the agreement of defence, they received no military reinforcements. Nevertheless, France became militarily involved through an interposition as a peacekeeper of the UNOCI force. In doing so, France gave herself the opportunity to indirectly influence the crisis-situation. Waage (2004) argues that conflict mediation, e.g. France in the example above, is often as much about national interests, as altruism and peacekeeping. The French military response to the 2004 air strike from Ivorian forces can be interpreted as a sign of indirect control being substituted with direct violence. This event, in addition to the escalation of violence at Hotel Ivoire a few days later, suggests a loss of control on the part of France. This argument can be supported further by looking at the French 'cover-up'-

attempt following the Hotel shooting: in an attempt to gain control over the situation, France publicly reiterated that President Gbagbo was to blame for the situation getting out of control, taking no responsibility themselves.

The examples presented above seem to support the idea that when the structure of imperialism is threatened, it may force the Center to resort to direct violence against the Periphery. The French military response can thus be interpreted to have been enforced as a last resort to regain some form of control in Côte d'Ivoire and, in line with the neo-imperialistic framework, be interpreted as a form of military imperialism.

5.3 It Is All About The Bridgehead

By applying Galtung's structural theory of imperialism to the French presence in Côte d'Ivoire we have found elements that indicated an imperial structure being present between the two nations, even before the outbreak of the conflict in 2002; there was a harmony of interest between the two states that rested on a stable bridgehead relation between the centers in each country. Moreover, the new and proposed Ivorian political reforms appear to have shaped France's choices and actions leading up to, and during, the crisis. The threat of an Ivorian government with lesser French loyalists is one important example. Accordingly, the two cases analyzed in chapter 4 strengthen the assumption of a relationship of dominance between the two parties when studied through Galtung's framework.

The bridgehead between France and Côte d'Ivoire has clearly weakened over time and appears to rapidly deteriorate after the 2000 election. Judging from the events above and in previous chapters; it seems evident that France is attempting to secure her dominant position, using all means necessary. Thus, it should be fair to claim that French presence in the Côte d'Ivoire conflict is about protecting the bridgehead relation so as to secure and uphold the structure of neo-imperialism.

5.4 Contributions and Further Research

The progression of academic research and development frequently cause scholars to abandon old theories and arguments, as new concepts and findings take precedence. Galtung's structural theory of imperialism is among these theories that are no longer as frequently applied to current research. Nevertheless, the analysis presented still indicates that applying his theoretical framework may provide fruitful insight to a current phenomenon, and more specifically to the relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire. This study has not sought to provide an absolute explanation for the French involvement in the crisis, but rather to contribute with one possible way of interpreting her presence and influence.

Furthermore, an analytical approach to the French presence in the Ivorian crisis from 2002-2007 is largely absent in most of the written material on the event. Since the topic at hand is describing fairly recent events, it is important to take into account up-to-date and relevant information, as much as possible. It should also be fair to say that this study has brought about new information and topics of discussion in regards to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire.

Lastly, the application of Galtung's theoretical framework presents options for future research on the French presence in the Ivorian crisis. One could focus on attaining direct statements from French government officials on how they view France's role in the conflict. One should also aim to identify other types of neo-imperialism, as classified by Galtung, within the context of the Ivorian crisis. Information gathered during the fieldwork conducted in Côte d'Ivoire indeed pointed towards other types of imperialism. When attempting to investigate only one element of a large and complex phenomenon as the case presented, it becomes very clear how interconnected every element of such a conflict is. A larger and more in-depth study that takes into account all these elements, may help strengthen the arguments presented in this study further, and ultimately support the notion that international relations are still very much rooted in the ancient mindset of 'defeat and conquer', as they were during colonial times...

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